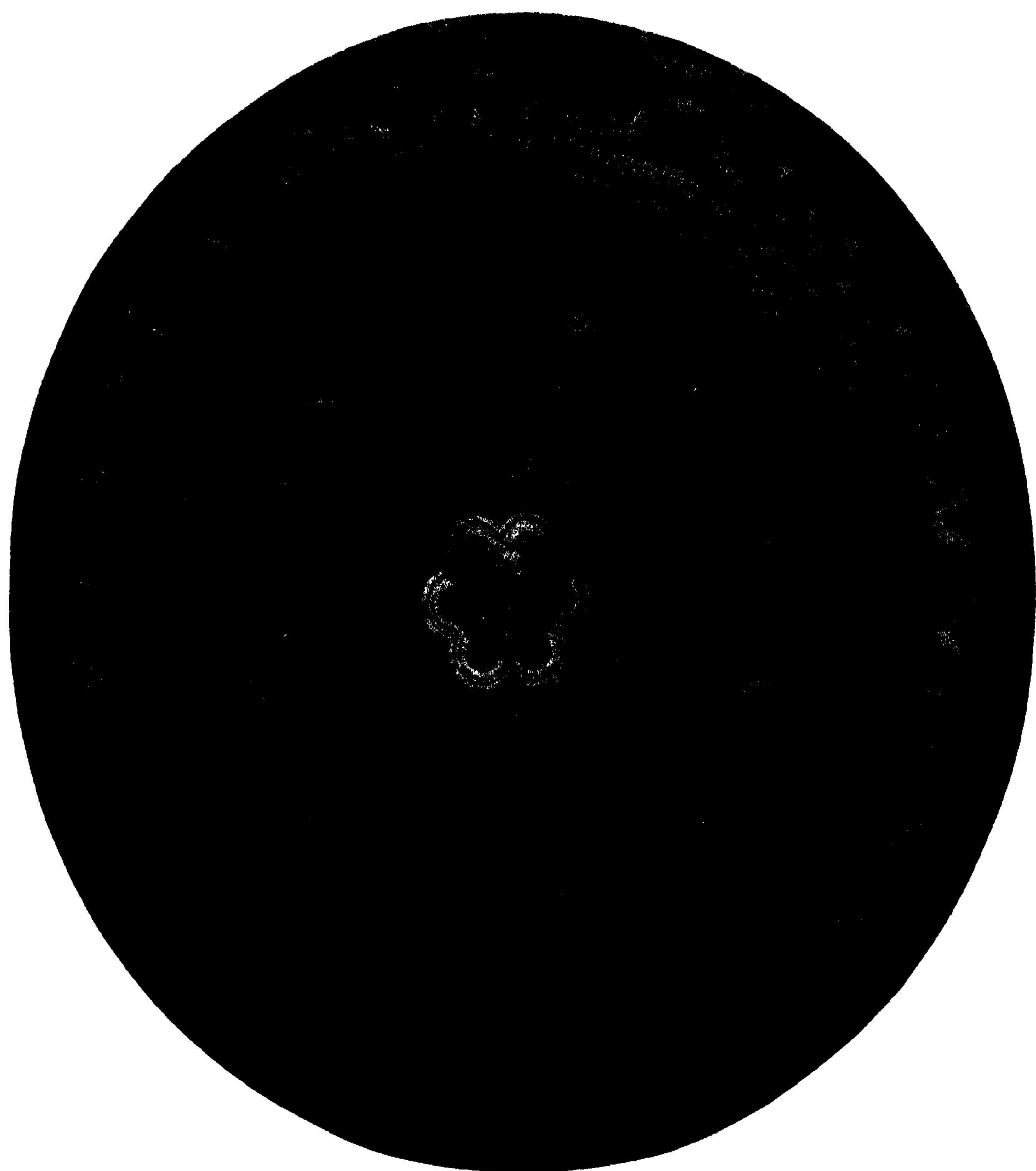
On previous page

The ceiling in the south bay in the *navacaukī* in the Lunavasāhi temple consists of seven receding courses; the first is octagonal and the rest are circular. In the centre of the ceiling are an opened lotus cut out with three rows of incurved lotus petal-and-bud motif each and a stamenal tube clasped by two rows of petals.

This ceiling is the finest example of the lotus petal-and-bud motif.

Jain Temples of Rajasthan



A Thousand-Petalled Lotus

Jain Temples of Rajasthan

Architecture & Iconography

Sehdev Kumar



INDIRA GANDHI NATIONAL CENTRE FOR THE ART
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- In Praise of Hands -
for
The Artists
who created works of such splendour



Dedicated to the memory of
Raaj Jain
A Man who embodies the spirit of his faith



Parsvanātha with a thousand-hooded serpent, Ādīśvara temple, 15th Century Rajasthan

On page II

Colour Plate D-17:

On a portico ceiling in the Vimalavasāhi temple, a lotus with four circular courses. There are also dancers, *caurī*-bearers, *yakṣas*, and *kinnara* couples as part of the composition.

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Conch-shell at the entrance of Lunavasāhi temple, 13th c., Rajasthan.

On page VII

Colour Plate B-3:

Central dome in the *raṅgamaṇḍapa* in the Vimalavasahi temple. The *raṅgamaṇḍapa* is a thirteenth century addition to the temple. Sixteen *vidyādevīs* and sixteen *vidyādharas* are part of the embellishment of the dome which is 25 ft in diameter and less than 30 ft in height, from the floor to the apex. The dome is shaped like a lotus flower and is composed of eleven circular courses and a long circular *padmaśilā*, the pendant of the lotus.

On pages VIII, IX

Colour Plate C-10:

Goddess Ambikā on a panel in the Lunavasāhi temple, flanked on either side by dancers, water-carriers and women churning milk.

On page X

Colour Plate J-14:

An image of *tīrthaṅkara* Mahāvīra in the Jain temple at Dilwara, with four other images of *jinas*, two standing and two sitting. Also shown are *gandharvas*, *yakṣīs*, Naigameṣin (goat-headed and pot-bellied), lions and elephants.

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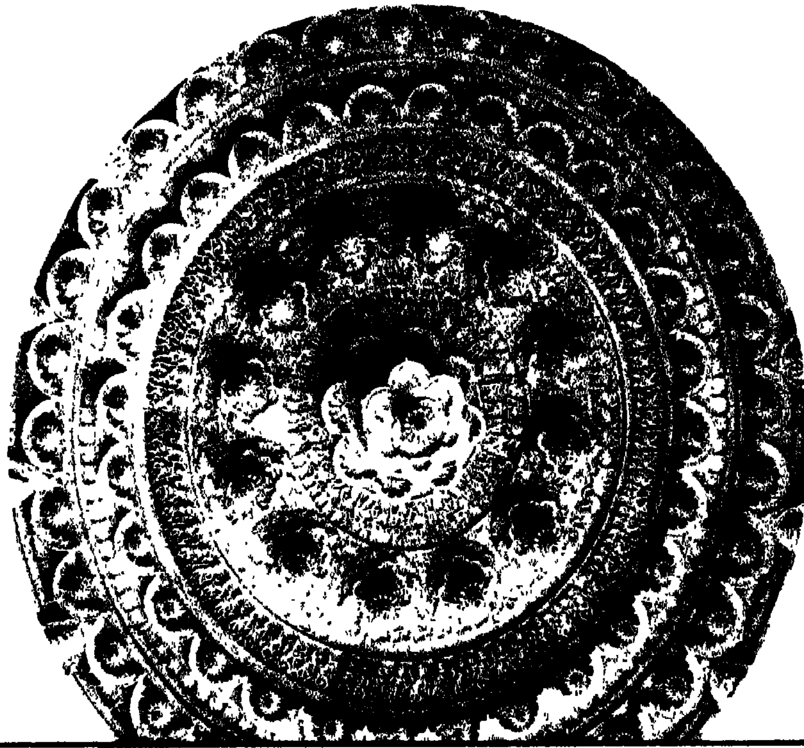
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महामंत्र नवकार

नमो अरिहंताणं

नमो सिद्धाणं

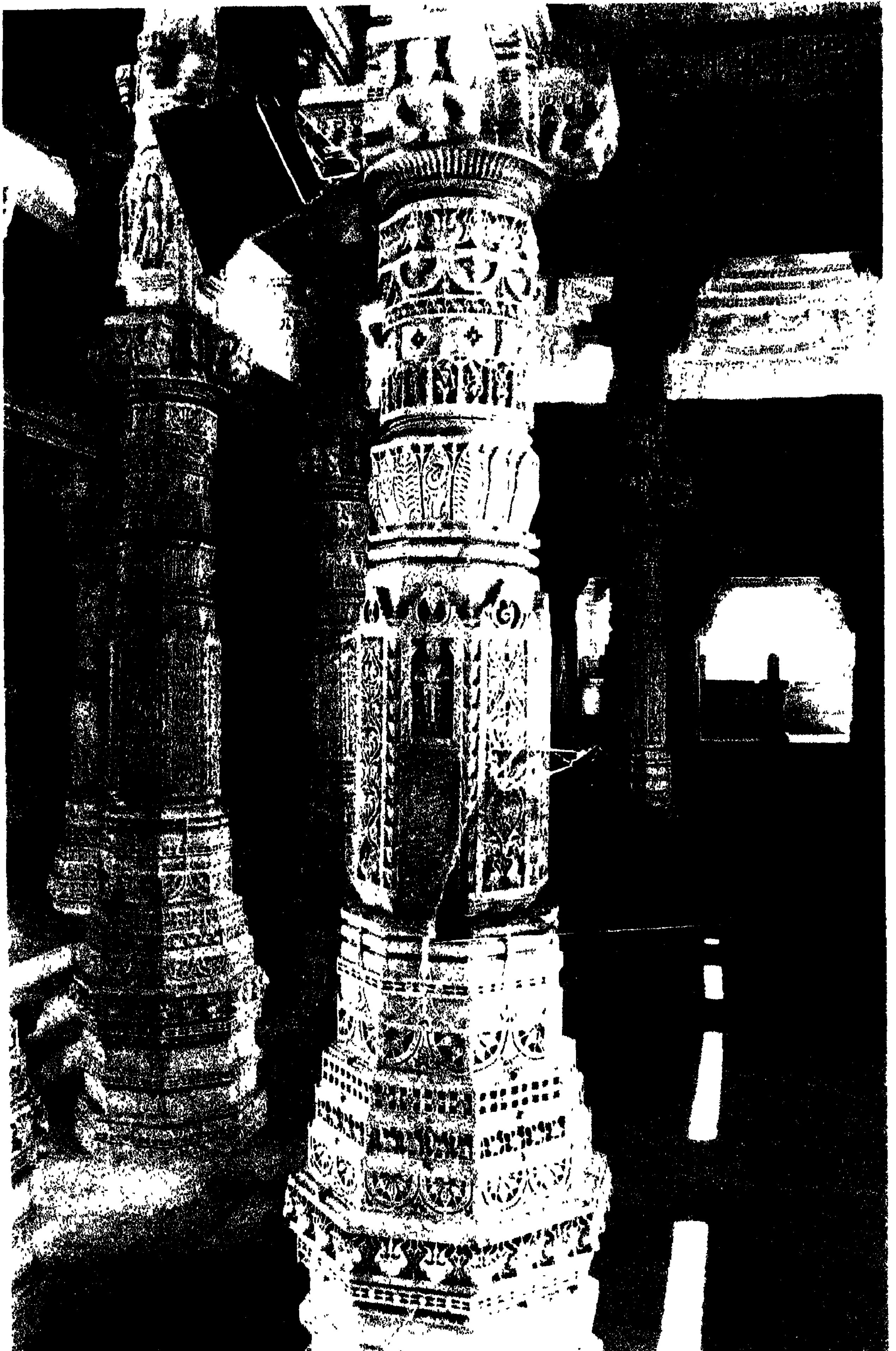
नमो आयरियाणं

नमो उवज्झायाणं

नमो लोए सव्वसाहूणं

एसो पंच नमुक्कारो, सव्व पावप्पणासणो

मंगलाणं च सव्वेसिं, पढमं हवइ मंगलं



An inside view of Adiśvara Temple, 15th c., Rajasthan

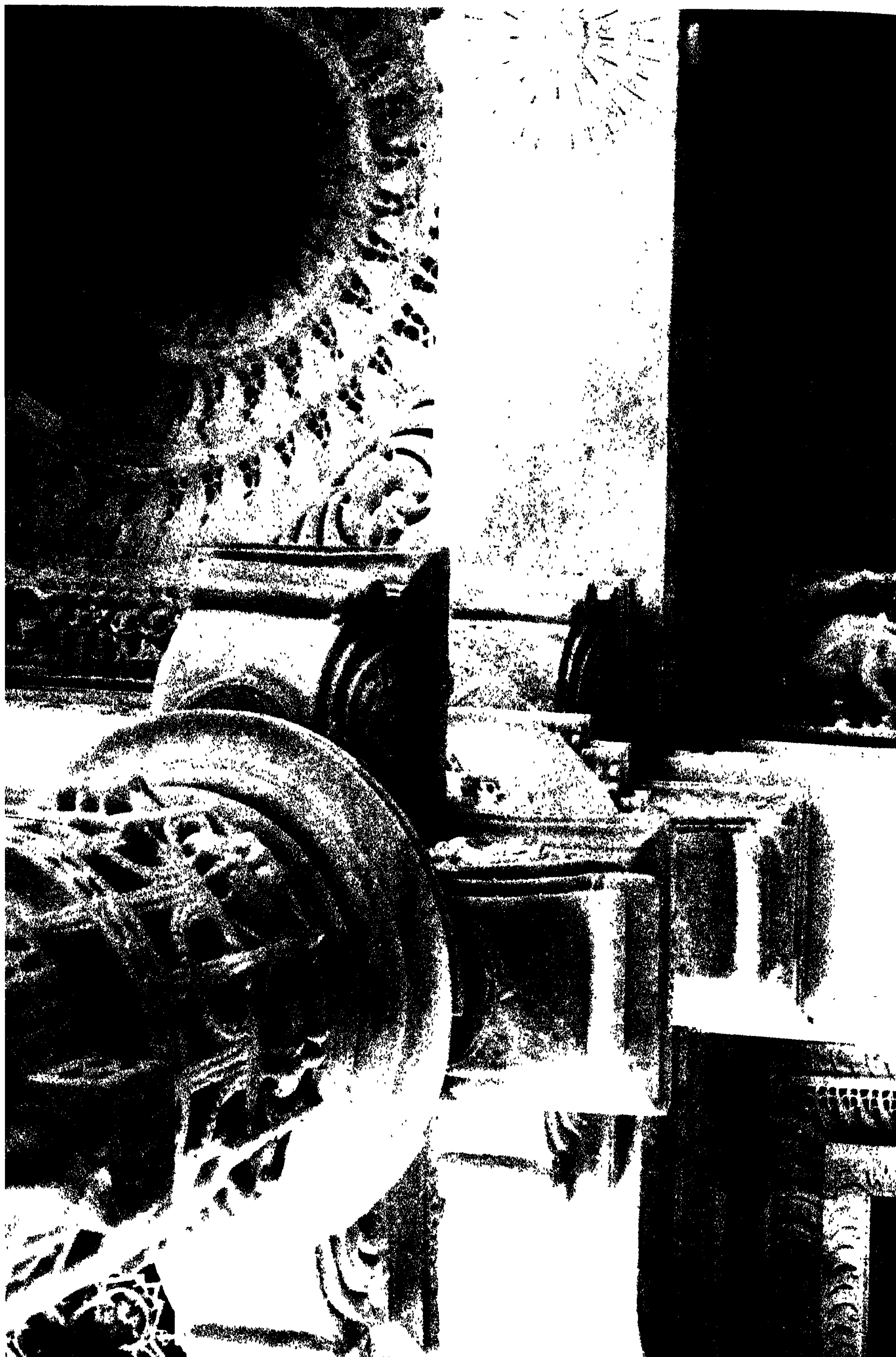
Preface

The length and breadth of India is dotted with great architectural monuments: the temples at Belur and Halebid, the Sun Temple at Konark, the Kailash Temple at Ellora, the Buddhist stūpa at Sanchi are all expressions of an abiding artistic exuberance that is part of the cultural heritage of India.

As the birthplace of several major religious traditions, India is a natural sacred ground for a stone or a rock to be transformed into a work of art. For centuries, the sumptuous Indian mythology — of the Hindus, the Buddhists and the Jains — enriched the imagination of the artist in a thousand different ways, inspiring him to create works that are at once earthy and heavenly, like a lotus flower. In the splendour of architectural spaces, any column, or a ceiling, or a wall served for the artist as a canvas, to be painted upon, to be chiselled, and to be sculpted, for celebration, or worship, or adoration. Gods and goddesses, *yakṣas* and *yakṣīs*, dancers and musicians, *apsarās* and *nāgins*, trees and flowers, all revealed a drama that was endlessly human and mythic. An Indian temple thus is a veritable art gallery, a theatre and a museum.

The Jains have been the great temple builders in India particularly in the states of Rajasthan and Gujarat. Their temples are marked by the same aplomb that is evident in other Indian temples. Many consider the Jains or their rituals, at times, to be somewhat otherworldly; however, as temple-builders they evince all the earthiness of a stone-cutter, or a jeweller. There is thus a great sense of detail and precision in their craft. The Jains are rooted in an orthodox tradition but they are far from unwilling to try new tools and new materials.

The history of construction of Jain temples in Rajasthan and elsewhere is well-documented by a number of distinguished scholars. The present work explores, somewhat impressionistically, the iconographic and architectural details of two sets of Jain temples in Rajasthan, one at Dilwara in Mount Abu and the other at Ranakpur, within the larger tradition of Indian arts and temple architecture. These two sets of temples are separated from each other by some five hundred years and two hundred kilometres. Yet there is an unbroken continuity of icons and images in these temples that is part of a still larger continuous tradition of temple





architecture in India. Over a span of five hundred years, there is an artistic growth and a movement, but all within an abiding cultural stillness that can be perhaps best understood with a certain mythopoeic reference that goes beyond the mere facts of history.

This work has been in the making since 1980; the photographs and the reflections on the iconography and architecture — with numerous stories that are enfolded in them — needed much defining and refining at many stages. In this process I am beholden to many in several places: at the Indian Institute of Advanced Study in Shimla, during my Fellowship in 1986-87, and at the Universities of Waterloo and Toronto in Canada for discussions with Dr. Michael Aris, Dr. S.C. Malik, Dr. Sukrita Kumar, Professor M.M. Agrawal, Professor Rekha Jhanji, Professor Joseph O'Connell and Professor Frank Thompson. My gratitude is also to Shastri Indo-Canadian Institute, Ontario Arts Council, Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada and Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts for supporting this work in numerous ways.

This work could not have been completed in the present form without the support and guidance of Dr. Kapila Vatsyayan at all stages. I express my profound gratitude to Kapilaji for seeing it through.

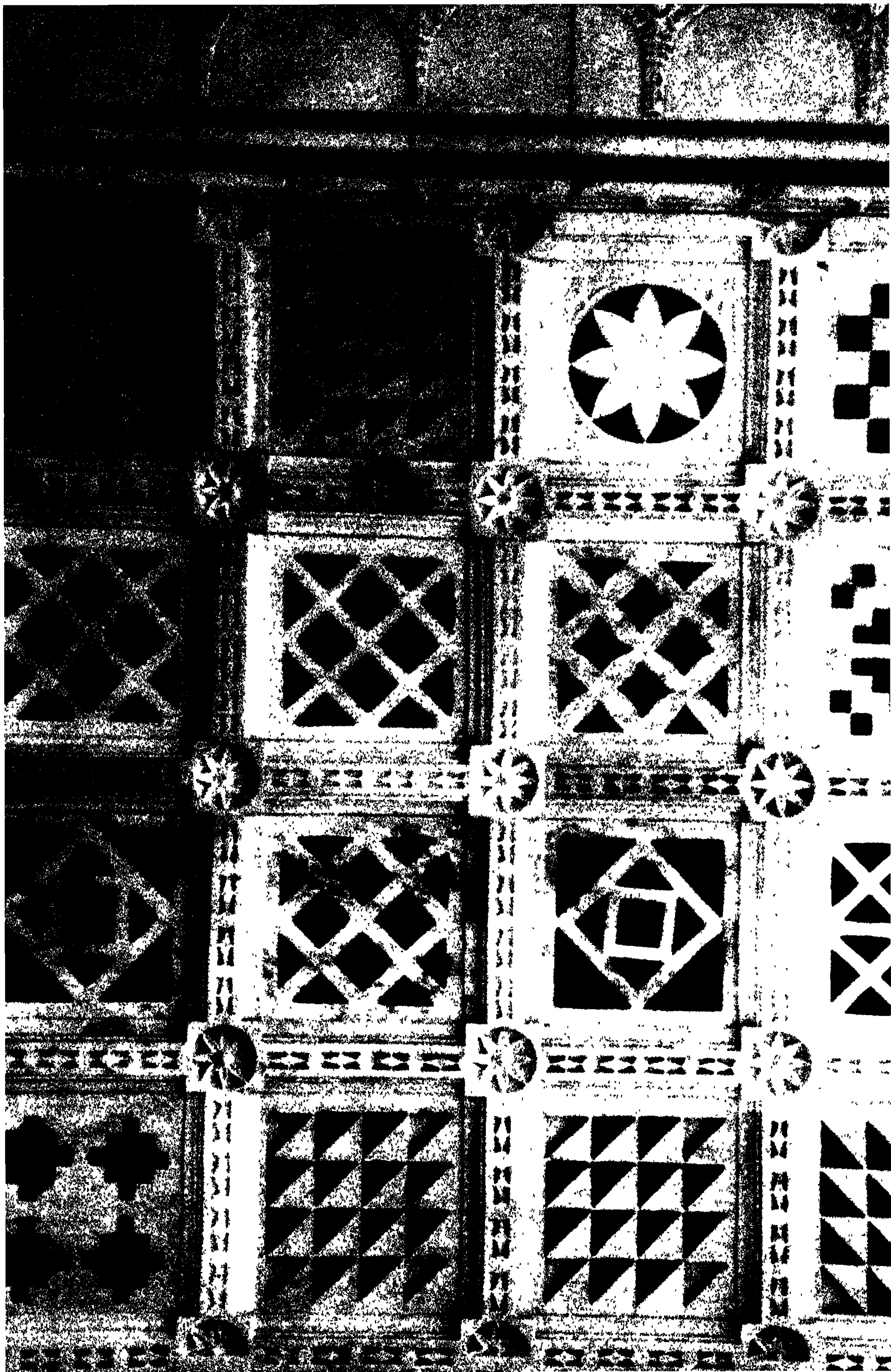
I am also much thankful to Dr. L.M. Gujral, Consultant, IGNCA, and to Mr. Shakti Malik of Abhinav Publications for their support and dedication for this work.

Above all I am beholden for a certain reflection on these temples to the immensely gifted artists and the artisans who created works of such grandeur many centuries ago.

Sehdev Kumar



A *caurī*-bearer in a corridor ceiling in the Vimalavasāhi temple, accompanying goddess Cakreśvarī



Chapter I

In the Beginning

Jainism and its Cosmology

For over two thousand years, three spiritual and artistic traditions — Jain, Buddhist and Hindu — have flourished on the Indian subcontinent. Of these, Buddhism and Hinduism — and various myths and artistic expressions associated with them — have, to varying degrees, travelled to many other Asian countries, but Jainism flourished only in India, and there too only in some parts. Nevertheless, its contribution to the Indian arts and culture, and what may be called Indian ethos, has been outstanding.

Jainism has certain features that distinguish it from the other two traditions, but since all these three traditions originated and flourished in India, there is much that is common in all of them. One thing, however, that is most distinct about Jainism is its very high emphasis on forbearance and *ahiṁsā* — 'non-violence', both as a personal and social creed.

This emphasis is often so pronounced that it makes the Jains seem sometimes almost otherworldly. Yet, in most spheres of life, the Jains have always been known to be the most worldly people. Certainly, no people who have built such magnificent temples for so long, as the Jains have done, could afford to be 'otherworldly'. Even when the gods they worship are eternally meditating, or the life they yearn for seems transcendental, what they have created seems to have kept them very much down to earth.

Poets may be otherworldly, or dancers and artists, but not builders. And the Jains, above everything else, have been builders. The challenge of building temples with colossal domes and tall pillars, and moving heavy stones and bricks — sometimes over enormous distances and tortuous terrain — all in the midst of political rivalries and external assaults, labour disputes and contractors' greeds — would keep anyone well-grounded.

This has certainly been true for the Jains.

When we look at great monuments of antiquity we sometimes tend to forget that even though many of them were built for the glory of god, they were not built by the gods but by human hands

On previous page
Grilled wall of the *hastiśālā*, the Lunavasāhi temple.



— with all their frailties, hopes and uncertainties. It is thus all the more overwhelming that in the midst of such everyday struggle for existence should emerge such wondrous works of beauty. It is, as though, a 'thousand-petalled lotus' has sprung from the muddy depths of water.

Hail the lotus, but ah, hail the mud too in whose mysterious 'womb' such splendour resides.

Is it likely that when one comprehends the nature of the lotus one understands that the lotus and the mud are one!

उद्दीप्ताखिलरत्नमुद्धृतजडं नानानयान्तर्गृहं
सस्यात्कारसुधाभिलिप्ति जनिभृत्कारुण्यकूपोच्छ्रितम्।
आरोप्य श्रुतयानपात्रममृतद्वीपं नयन्तः परा–
नेते तीर्थकृतो मदीयहृदये मध्येभवाब्ध्यासताम्।।

May they dwell in my heart — the *Tirthankaras,*
who, taking on board the ship of sacred lore,
possessed of all brilliant jewels, freed from
bilge-water (otherwise saving the ignorant),
containing various models of arguments,
painted with the nectar of the *syatkara,* and
furnished with the high mast of compassion
for all living creatures —
others found in the middle of the ocean
of worldly existence, carry them over to
the island of immortality.[1]

The Jains believe their religion to have started with the first blossoming of human civilization. The word *Jain* is derived from the Sanskrit word *jina* — 'a conqueror', one who has conquered the inner world of suffering, temptations and illusions. A *jina* is also known as a *tīrthaṅkara* — 'one who helps to ford the river of phenomenal existence — *saṁsār,* or of *bhavasāgar',* 'the ocean of birth and rebirth'.

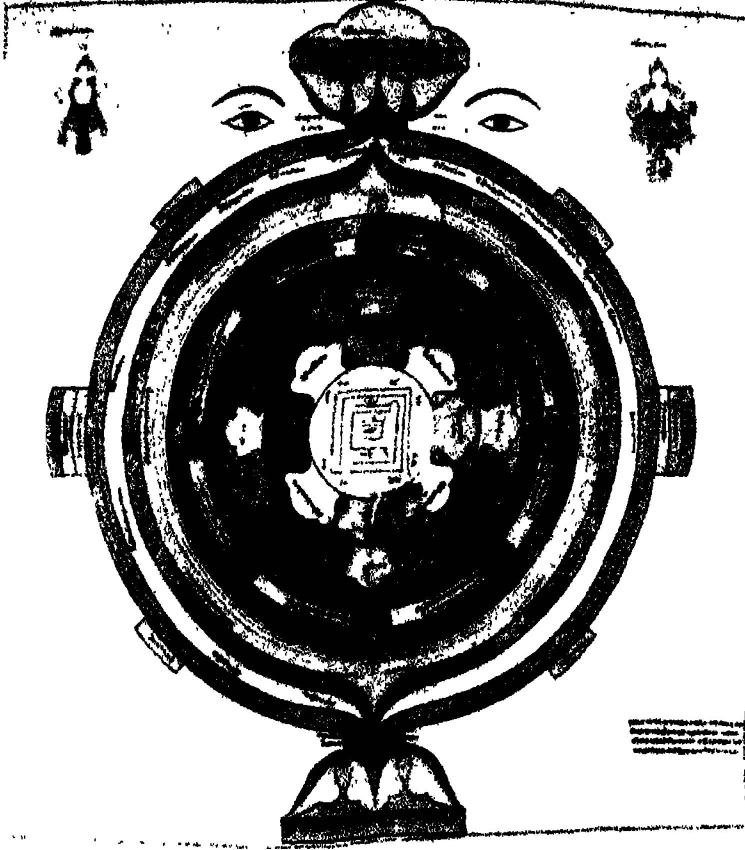
A *tīrthaṅkara* is a liberated being who has achieved *nirvāṇa.* Through *kevalajñāna* — 'supreme knowledge' — he has been enlightened. A *tīrthaṅkara* is also a great teacher and a liberator of others who are still mired in the muddy waters of endless cycle of existence.

The Jains believe that there have been twenty-four such luminous beings, the *tīrthaṅkaras,* the last of whom was Mahāvīra — 'the great warrior', a contemporary of Buddha, twenty-five hundred years ago. The Jain scholars, however, contend that the twenty-third *tīrthaṅkara* Pārśvanātha preceded Mahāvīra by about two hundred and fifty years and that the history of the period of Neminātha, the twenty-second *tīrthaṅkara,* corresponds with

On page 2
An image of *jina* in *khattaka* in *mukhamaṇḍapa* in the Lunavasāhi temple, with dancers on columns.



Column with images of *jinas* in the Vimalavasāhi temple



Siddhacakrayantra, an auspicious diagram: In this complex diagram, the characteristic motif is the stylised lotus in the centre, whose petals pay homage to the five model personages and four fundamental principals of Jainism. There are two all-seeing eyes at the top, and figures of Śiva and goddess Cakreśvarī on either side.

The diagram expands from the centre, which is the place for the *jina*, the *arihanta*. Around it are four lotus petals for the *siddha*, 'the perfected one', *ācārya*, 'the spiritual teacher', *upadhyaya*, 'the religious preceptor', and the *sadhu*, 'the Jain monk'.

The white centre of the lotus bears 'seeds' and the auspicious symbol *om* and *hrim*, surrounded by vowels of the devanāgri script. Of the sixteen exterior petals of the corolla, alternate ones are inscribed with vowels and different classes of consonants. On each of the intervening eight petals, the salutations to the *arihantas* are written.

On the exterior corona of the lotus can be seen inscribed eight times, like a litany, the words, in Prakrit, *om namo arihantanam*, while on the interior corona, are inscribed Sanskrit words:

om hrim siddhebhyah svahah
om hrim darsanaya svahah
om hrim acaryaya svahah
om hrim jnanaya svahah
om hrim upadhyayaya svahah
om hrim caritraya svahah
om hrim sarva-sadhu-ji svahah
om hrim tapase svahah

Gouache on cloth, 1892, Jaipur.
Courtesy: Ravi Kumar, *The Jain Cosmology*.

that of Kṛṣṇa, and that Kṛṣṇa and Nemināthа were cousins. Even the first *tīrthaṅkara*, Ṛṣabhanātha [or Ādinātha, as he is generally known], is traced back to Ṛgveda, and many a Jain temple is dedicated to him.

Mahāvīra, however, is commonly considered to be the founder of Jainism. In his own lifetime, in the sixth century B.C., in the region of Bihar, he had a large following, and there was an order of monks that practised severe austerities and went about naked. The written canon of Mahāvīra's teachings, however, was not composed till after several centuries of his death. Soon after Mahāvīra's death, there was a devastating famine in Bihar, the region where Jainism first took roots. Circumstances thus forced the leader of largest group of Jain monks, Bhadrabāhū, to emigrate with his companions to southern parts of India, to Karnataka. Another group, under the spiritual leadership



A *cauri*-bearer in a corridor ceiling in the Vimalavasahi temple, accompanying goddess Cakresvari

of Sthūlibhadra, stayed on; this group adopted some new modes of conduct and came to be known as *Śvetāmbara* — 'the white clad'. Its monks were no longer naked; instead they wore white clothes, and observed less severe austerities. The group of monks, under the leadership of Bhadrabāhū, that migrated to Karnataka, however, continued to observe the strict regulations of nudity and prescribed methods of begging and eating food. The followers of this sect came to be known as *Digāmbara,* 'the sky clad'.

This schism in the Jain community endangered the continuation of oral tradition of Jain philosophy and thought. In order to reconstruct the Jain canon, after the death of Bhadrabāhū, a great Jain council was called at Pataliputra in Bihar. The fourteen *Purvas* — 'former texts' — were replaced by twelve *Aṅgas* — 'selections'. This canon, however, was accepted only by the Śvetāmbaras; the Digāmbaras considered the reconstructed fragments as without authority. It was in the fifth century A.D., at another council at Valabhi in Gujarat, that the Śvetāmbara canon was finally written down. These works were written in a popular Prakrit dialect. Over the decades and centuries that followed, both Śvetāmbaras and Digāmbaras began to use Sanskrit, a language of scholars. These later works comprise a large number of commentaries on canonical texts as well as independent works on monastic rules, ethics, grammar, astronomy, philosophical literature and narratives in verse. In South India, the Jain works were composed in Kannada, Telugu and Tamil.

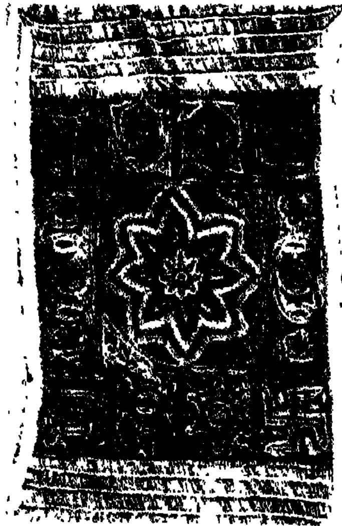
The 'Kalpasūtra of Bhadrabāhū' is the best known and the most popular work in all of Jain literature. It is divided into three sections. The first section deals with the lives of the *jinas,* the second with the life of Mahāvīra and the third with the rules for the ascetics.

Whether historical or not, for the Jain followers, and the artists and the myth makers, for centuries, not only Mahāvīra but all *tīrthaṅkaras* have had great real, living presence. The stories and legends about their miraculous births, the temptations and struggles they had to endure on their spiritual journey, the moments of their *dīkṣā* — 'worldly renunciation', and of *kevalajñāna* — 'enlightenment', and of the final *nirvāṇa* — a 'farewell to the phenomenal world' are all part of a Jain's religious consciousness, and his sense of the sacred geography. For the Jains, any place on earth that has been sanctified by an association with any of the 'five luminous events' — *pañca mahā kalyāṇaka* — in the lives of the *tīrthaṅkaras* is a *tīrtha* — 'a ford'; such a place is sacred, it is a *tīrthakṣetra* — 'a holy place'. It is also a place where some great ascetics may have lived and achieved liberation, or a place distinguished for its great temples and images of the *jinas.* For the Jains, there are many such *tīrthakṣetras* all over India, but particularly in the states of Gujarat and Rajasthan. Places such as

Girnar, Taranga, Satrunjaya, Mount Abu, Ranakpur, Kumbharia — many of them located on mountain tops, with commanding view of the valleys below them — have not only prominent Jain temples established there for centuries, but are also centres of great pilgrimages where hundreds of thousands of pilgrims gather every year.

Mount Abu, the site of Dilwara Jain temples, is one of the most sacred hills of the Jains. An inscription of 1370 A.D. suggests that Mahāvīra visited the Abu region during his travels as a monk. There are also references to the region — known as Arbuda or Arbudachala — in Ṛgveda and the Skanda Purāṇa, with numerous legends and myths associated with it.

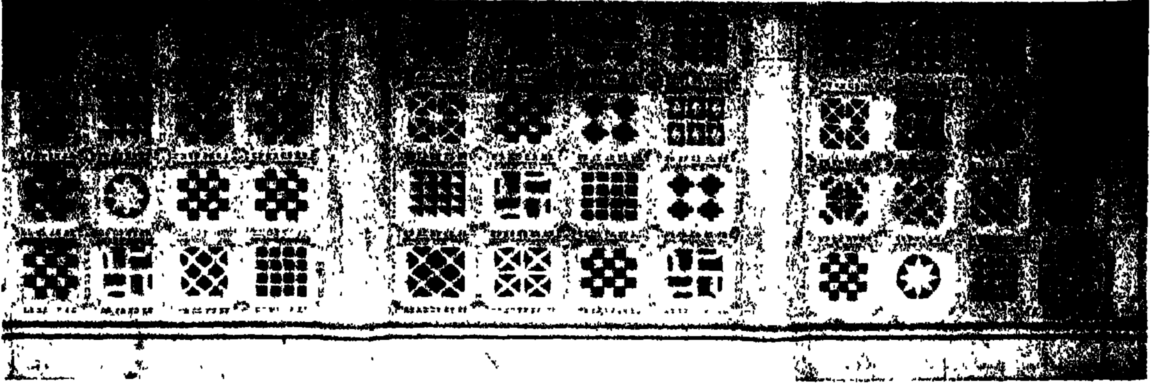
Mount Abu is part of the Aravalli mountain range and is detached from it by a narrow valley. The village of Dilwara in Mount Abu has many Jain and Hindu temples and has been known for centuries as *Devakulapāṭaka* or *Devalapāṭaka* — 'a region of temples'.



Pata with eight Auspicious Symbols, aṣṭamaṅgala, Gujarat, c. 1950-75. The symbols, auspicious śrīvatsa mark, water-filled pot, auspicious seat, a pair of fish, mirror, powder box and auspicious whorl.



Tīrthaṅkara Ādinātha, in silver clothes and bedecked with flowers, the Vimalavasāhi temple.



Grilled wall of the *hastiśālā*, the Lunavasāhi temple.

In a group of five Jain temples at Dilwara, two temples — the 11th century Vimalavasāhi and the 13th century Lunavasāhi (also known as Tejahpāla temple) — are the focus of the present work. The third temple — another focal point in this meditation — is the 15th century Caumukha temple at Ranakpur, also in Rajasthan. These three temples thus span a period of almost five hundred years; it was a period that saw enormous political upheavals not only in Rajasthan but all over India. There is much that is different in these three magnificent temples, but, equally, there is a great deal that is very much common. There is a certain iconographic and artistic continuity that is most evident in these temples. The two temples at Dilwara are renowned for their sculptural work; the temple at Ranakpur for its architectural splendour.

Except for an occasional citation, almost all references — visual or otherwise — in the present study are to these three temples.

अवनितलगतानां कृत्रिमाकृत्रिमाणां
वनभवनगतानां दिव्यवैमानिकानाम्।
इह मनुजकृतानां देवराजार्चितानां
जिनवरनिलयानां भावतोहं स्मरामि।।

With devotion I recall the earthly abode of the
great Jinas — natural or transcendental — who
abound the Earth: in sylvan resorts with
heavenly beings in aerial chariots, and
in shrines erected here by humans and
worshipped by the gods.[2]

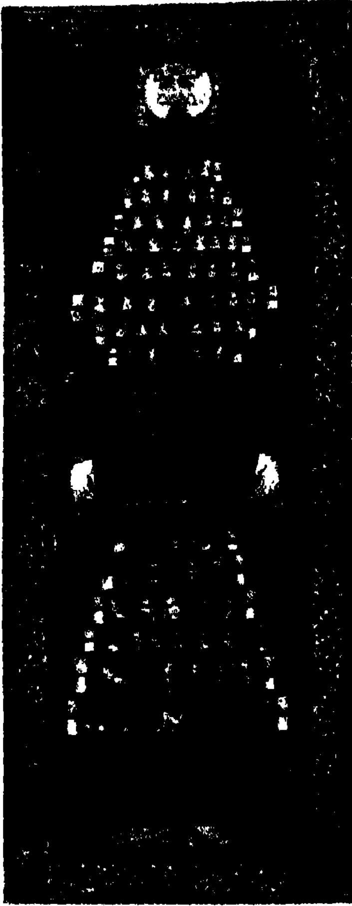
The Jains worship the five-fold divinity known as *Pañca-Parameṣṭhins*. They are: *Arhats* — twenty-four *tīrthaṅkaras; Siddhas* — 'the liberated souls'; *Ācāryas*—'the spiritual preceptors', usually through their symbolic representations called *sthāpanā; Upādhyāyas* — 'the teachers'; and *Sādhus* — 'monks' with no worldly ties. In each case specific qualities and attributes are associated with them. There are different *mantras* or syllables to remember and revere them. The first syllable of the names of these *Parameṣṭhins* constitutes the sacred syllable *Om*. The real worship, in the religious sense, is confined to the first two —



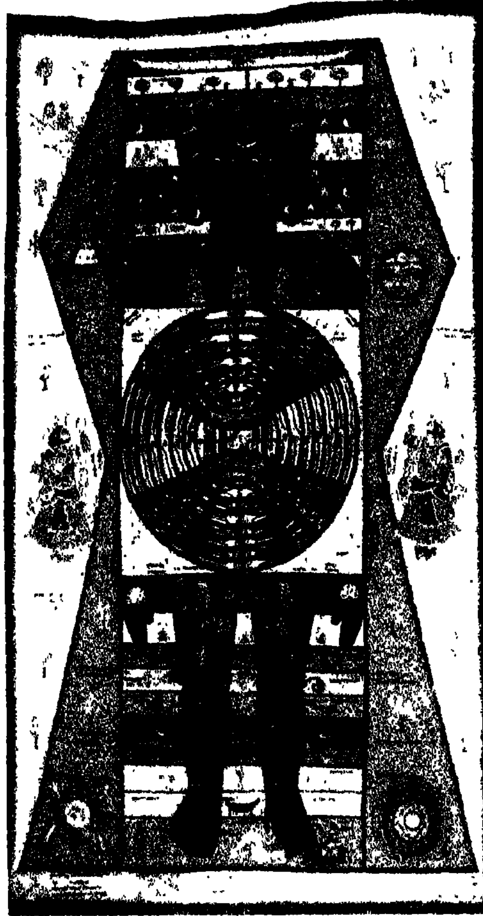


An image of jina in *khattaka* in *mukhamandapa* in the Lunavasahi temple, with dancers on columns

Parsvanatha, standing in *kayotsargamudra*, protected by a five-hooded serpent, in *mukhamandapa* in the Vimalavasahi temple.



Cosmic Being, Jain Book Cover, Gujarat, 18th century. Opaque watercolour on wood.



Lokapurusha, Cosmic Man, Rajasthan, c. 1884. Opaque watercolour on cloth. Linden Museum, Stuttgart.



Lokapurusha, Cosmic Man, Rajasthan, c. 1775. Opaque watercolour on cloth. The human body is divided into the *adholoka*, the *madhyaloka* and the *urdhvaloka* — lower, middle and upper worlds.

the *Arhats* and the *Siddhas*, particularly the *Arhats* — the *tīrthaṅkaras*. Their biographies are elaborate in many respects. There are hymns of praise in their honour, which are not intended to ask for anything from them, but the devotee who recites them hopes to develop their great qualities in himself. There are rituals, and *pujās* of various kinds to express devotion to the *tīrthaṅkaras*. All of these aim at purifying oneself by pious activities and finally at eliminating one's *karmans*, so that the *ātmā* becomes *paramātman*.[3]

The most important ritual in a Jain temple consists of a sacred bath given to the image of a *tīrthaṅkara*. This is a ritual reenactment of Lord Indra's bathing the *tīrthaṅkara* after his

birth. The morning ritual usually consists of anointing the image with saffron and sandalwood paste, sprinkling water and offering flowers, rice and coins. In Śvetāmbara temples the ritual is more elaborate. The worshippers first clean the platform and the image, then give a bath, play music, hold a lamp in front of the image, wave *caurī* whiskers, ring the bell and kneel in front of the image. In their rituals, the Śvetāmbaras make profuse use of flowers, fruit and sandalwood paste, and they decorate their images with precious metals and jewellery. The cultic image of the Śvetāmbaras is shown wearing a loin-cloth and with prominent eyeballs, which are either inlaid or painted, or fixed from the outside. The Digāmbaras, on the other hand, rarely use flowers or jewellery in their worship. Their images are completely naked and do not show eyeballs.

With *jina* images eight 'auspicious symbols' called *aṣṭamangalaka* are often associated; these are: *svastika* [swastika], *śrīvatsa* [a diamond-shaped mark], *nandyāvarta* [a variant on Swastika], *varadhamānaka* [a powder flask], *bhadrāsana* [a seat], *kalaśa* [a pot], *darpana* [a mirror] and *matsya* [fish]. There are innumerable references in the canonical texts to *aṣṭamanagalaka* and they are held in great reverence by the Jains.

The *aṣṭamangalaka* appear on the door lintel or window frame of domestic shrines or temples, especially those of wood. In some Jain temples low wooden tables incised with the eight auspicious marks are placed before the shrine as offering stands.

Among the statues of the *tīrthaṅkaras* the most common are those of the first *tīrthaṅkara* Ādinātha — with bull as his mount, of the twenty-third *tīrthaṅkara* Pārśvanātha — with snake as his mount, and the twenty-fourth *tīrthaṅkara* Mahāvīra — with lion as his mount.

Though images of the twenty-four *tīrthaṅkaras* can appear deceptively similar, there are important iconographic differences between them.

First, each image of the *jina* can be divided vertically into three sections, upper, middle and lower, representing the heavens, midregion and the earth. Placed generally in the middle with the lotus and the throne, and everything below symbolising the earth, the image of *jina* is like a cosmic pillar that unifies all three regions.

A *jina* may be represented either in *samapāda* posture, absolutely erect while standing with evenly paced feet, or seated in meditation like an ideal yogi. Early Buddha images of Kushana Mathura too are invariably shown in one of these two postures. While Buddhas of the Gupta period stand with a slight suggestion of movement along the vertical axis, the Jains never deviated from these two modes in representing their *jinas*. The

classic Viṣṇu image stands in *samapāda*. The image of Śiva in a temple usually consists of the *liṅga*. "The verticality of the image", Pal suggests, "is important for several reasons. It emphasises the symbolic nature of the image as a cosmic pillar connecting the three spheres. Here too, the influence of the Saṁkhya concept of Puruṣa can be discerned, where Puruṣa is pure consciousness and incapable of action. Thus the seemingly inert form, motionless and unshakable, is the closest that the artist could come to representing an abstract concept that cannot be defined by the senses."[4]

Seated *jinas* are invariably in the posture of meditation, *dhyānamudrā* with both hands placed in the lap, one on top of the other. Standing figures place their arms along either side of the body to emphasise immobility. The same meditation gesture is universally used for gods in all three religious traditions. Common to these traditions are two other gestures: of reassurance, *abhayamudrā*, with the right arm raised to the shoulder and the palm facing outward, and of charity, *varadamudrā*, with the right hand hanging down and the palm facing the viewer. Another common gesture symbolises spiritual teaching, *vyākhyānamudrā*, with the right hand at shoulder height and palm facing outward with the index finger and thumb joining to form a circle. By the third century, the Buddhists began to use this gesture to signify the first sermon of the Buddha; since then it has remained the classic gesture of wisdom in Buddhist art.

एको रागिषु राजते प्रियतमादेहार्धहारी हरो
नीरागेषु जिनो विमुक्तललनासङ्गो न यस्मात्पर ।
दुर्वारस्मरबाणपन्नगविषव्यासक्तिमूढो जन·
शेष· कामविडम्बितो हि विषयान् भोक्तुं न मोक्तु क्षम· ।।

—Bhartrhari, *Sṛṅgārasatakam*, verse 78

Amongst the impassioned the only outstanding being is Śiva, who makes half of his wife's body his own. Amongst the passionless, it is jina, who forsook the company of women; no one excels him in that category. But other people, numbed with the suffusion of the serpent's venom — love's irresistible arrow — and tormented by lust, can neither enjoy things nor free themselves from them [5]

The almost expressionless face of a *jina* image has been the subject of many an observation. "The emotional peak of elegance", writes Pereira, "is a kind of tranquillity — *śānta*, the *rasa* that in the Śaiva temples dominates the other *rasa*, and in Jain temples absorbs them all...passionlessness finds its highest expression in Jina as passion does in Śiva."

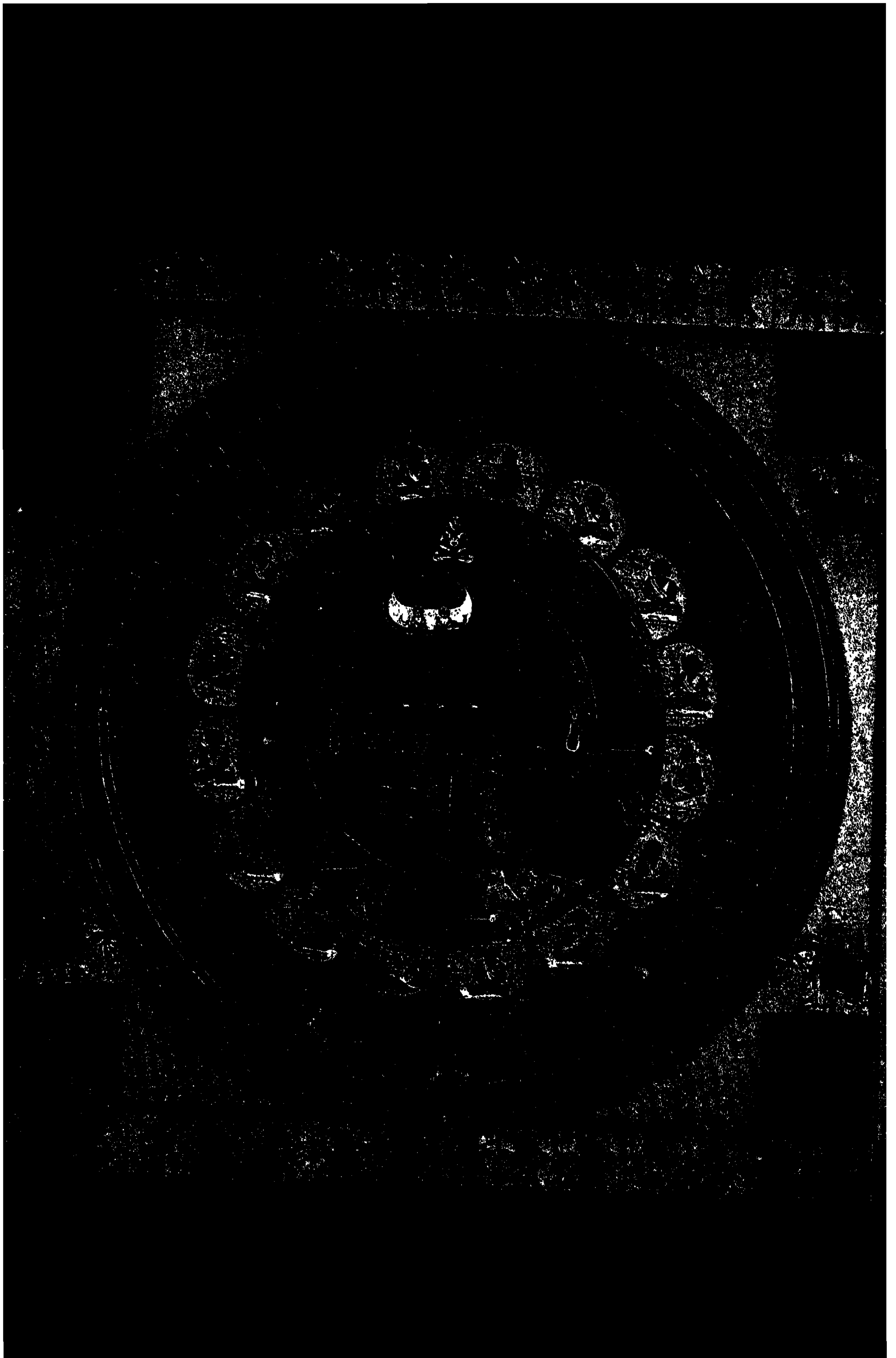
The primary features of a *tīrthaṅkara* figure are his serenity, his youthful body with long arms stretching down to the knees, and the auspicious symbol *śrīvatsa* marked on his chest. As Pal reminds us: "In contrast to this austere figure, his attendant gods and goddesses embody alluring physical charms in the typical Indian fashion. Perhaps this was intended to indicate the superiority of a Tīrthaṅkara even over the gods, who are still shackled by the bondage of desire and pleasure in their mythical world, whereas the Tīrthaṅkara has attained complete freedom."[6]

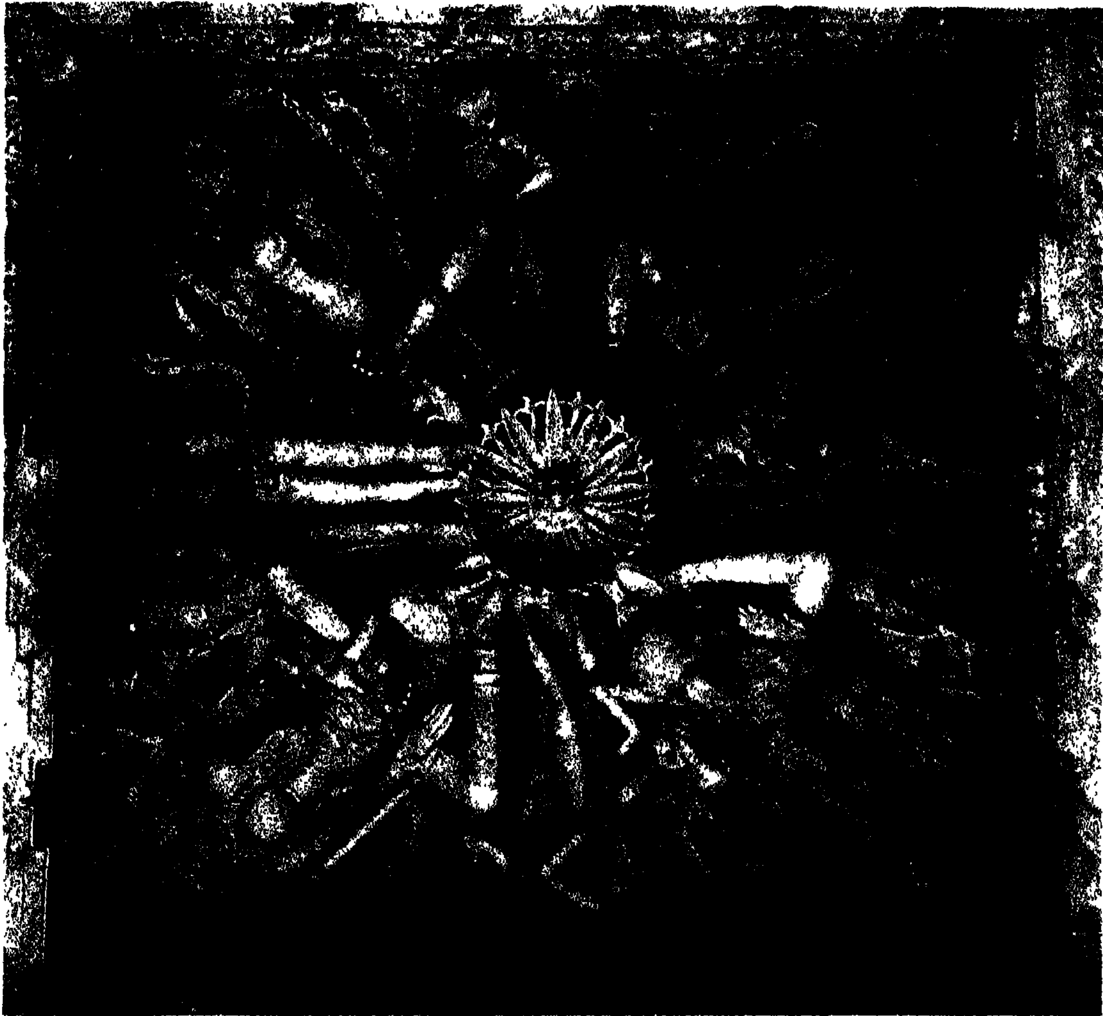
The Jain sculpture in general, whether in temples or elsewhere, has a preponderance of *jina* images, often with little freedom of expression or innovation for the artist. Referring to a *jina* image, in his classic study of the Indian myths and symbols, Zimmer observed: "The image of the released one seems neither animate nor inanimate, but pervaded by a strange and limitless calm."[7] Another observer described a standing *tīrthaṅkara* image as "a veritable embodiment of immovable strength and indestructible power, not unlike the tall and dignified sal tree — *sala-pramsu.*" Still others have admired 'the colossal calm', 'the simple dignity', or the *kāyotsarga* yoga posture of complete bodily abandonment, which is "the likeness of one such, who knows the boundless joy that lies beyond the senses, as is grasped by intuition, and who swerves not from the Truth, like that of a lamp in a windless place that does not flicker."[8]

The *jina* images thus are the likeness of those saviours who, in the words of Zimmer, "dwelt in a supernal zone at the ceiling of the universe, beyond the reach of the prayer there is no possibility of their assistance descending from that high and luminous place to the clouded sphere of human effort...The Makers of the River-crossing are beyond cosmic events as well as the problems of biography; they are transcendent, cleaned of temporality, omniscient, actionless and absolutely at peace."[9]

Whatever spiritual ambience one may detect in a *jina* image, however, it must be said that at an aesthetic level, it evokes rather limited response. In a Jain temple, for an aesthetic inspiration, one does not look at the image of the deity but elsewhere: on columns and ceilings, on the images of *yakṣas* and the *yakṣīs,* of goddesses Ambikā and Sarasvatī, or of Lakṣmī or Cakreśvarī, and above all on lotus and *campaka* flowers that hang from the ceilings like ice crystals.

In creating these pieces, the artists worked like ivory carvers — which many of them were. But they must have had a very highly cultivated sense of imagination, for, unlike ivory carvers who worked with pieces of ivory that could be handled and observed in myriad ways, the 'envisioning hands' of the sculptors in the temples could only imagine how their own piece would be part of the total form of the temple, and that too only after it was in place. In addition, a sculptor's piece could never be 'free'; it was always part of the architecture of the temple and its struc-





Four images of four-armed goddesses, all seated in *lalitāsana*: Vajrāṅkuśī, Cakreśvarī, Prajñapti and Vajraśṛṅkhalā on corridor ceiling in the Vimalavasāhi temple. The four images are placed diagonally in four corners. On either side of a goddess is an attendant carrying pitcher or garland. In the centre of the panel is a fully blossomed lotus.

tural and aesthetic coherence. It also had to be responsive to its own iconographic traditions, many of which were highly eclectic. Thus despite these restrictions, and whatever constraints the image of the *jina* placed on the sculptor's imagination, the freedom of the artist seemed to know no bounds in other areas.

In the Jain temples the twenty-four *tīrthaṅkaras* are the principal objects of worship and they occupy the foremost position in the Jain pantheon. The attendant gods — the *śāsanadevatās* — are next in order, and they are represented either on their own or in attendance to a *tīrthaṅkara*. The *śāsanadevatās* are *yakṣas* and *yakṣīs* and they are often shown on the threshold of the doorframe and on the stele of the *jina* image. Sometimes they are merely a part of the embellishment of the temple.

For the Jain icon makers, goddesses Ambikā and Cakreśvarī are the two most popular *yakṣīs*, and gods Sarvānubhūti and Brahmaśānti are the two most prominent *yakṣas*.

On page 16

Rhimkar mantra; paper; c. 1750 A.D.; Jaipur School.

Private Collection.


A musician and a six-armed Gaṇeśa in the Ādīśvara temple, Ranakpur.

Besides the *tīrthaṅkaras* and the *śāsanadevatās*, the Jain pantheon has sixteen *vidyādevīs*, eight *dikpālas*, goddesses Lakṣmī and Sarasvatī, *vidyādharas* — literally, 'carriers of knowledge', Vināyaka (Gaṇeśa), Naigameṣin, Kinnara and Pratihāra. All these divinities are represented in various parts of temples as part of embellishment rather than as an object of worship. The *vidyādevīs*, 'goddesses of knowledge', in particular, are unique to Jainism. Sometimes they are shown as a group of sixteen, as in the *raṅgamaṇḍapas* in the temples of Vimalavasāhi and Lunavasāhi in Dilwara; at other times they are shown individually, or in smaller groups. On one of the corridor ceilings at Vimalavasāhi, a group of four *vidyādevīs* are shown along the diagonals of a square. The *vidyādevīs* are generally presented on the walls, door-jambs, pillar-shafts, ceilings and the *rathikās* of the *śikhara*.[10]

Goddesses Sarasvatī and Lakṣmī occupy an important place in the Jain pantheon. They are generally presented on the ceilings, but sometimes also on the *pīṭha* of the sanctum. Sarasvatī has been given a special honour in both temples, at Vimalavasāhi and Lunavasāhi, as two ceilings are donated to her magnificent representation. In other Jain temples as well — Sambhavanātha temple at Kumbharia and Ajitanātha temple at Taranga — Sarasvatī has been portrayed on the ceilings in full splendour.

Goddess Lakṣmī is portrayed even more frequently, either by herself or, as Gaja-Lakṣmī, with elephants pouring water over her. In both temples, Vimalavasāhi and Lunavasāhi, Lakṣmī is presented on a number of places.

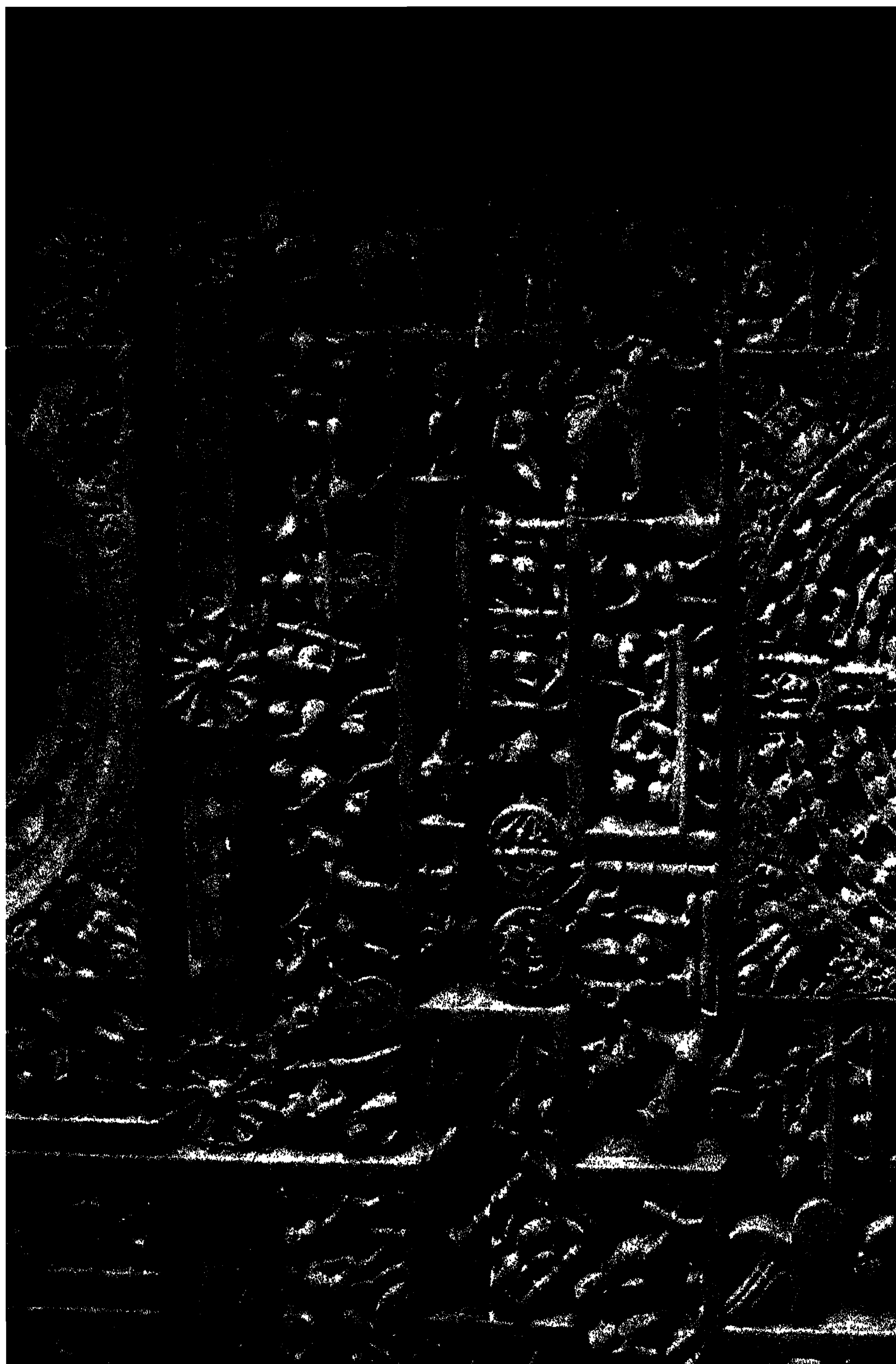
The images of Vināyaka (Gaṇeśa) are quite rare in Jain temples. In a small niche near the entrance of the Jain temple complex at Dilwara, there is an image of Gaṇeśa which has probably been installed fairly recently. Elsewhere, on the *pīṭha* of the Neminātha temple at Kumbharia and in the Mahāvīra temple at Kanthkot, there are small pieces of his representation. In the Caumukha temple at Ranakpur, however, Gaṇeśa has been presented at a number of places.

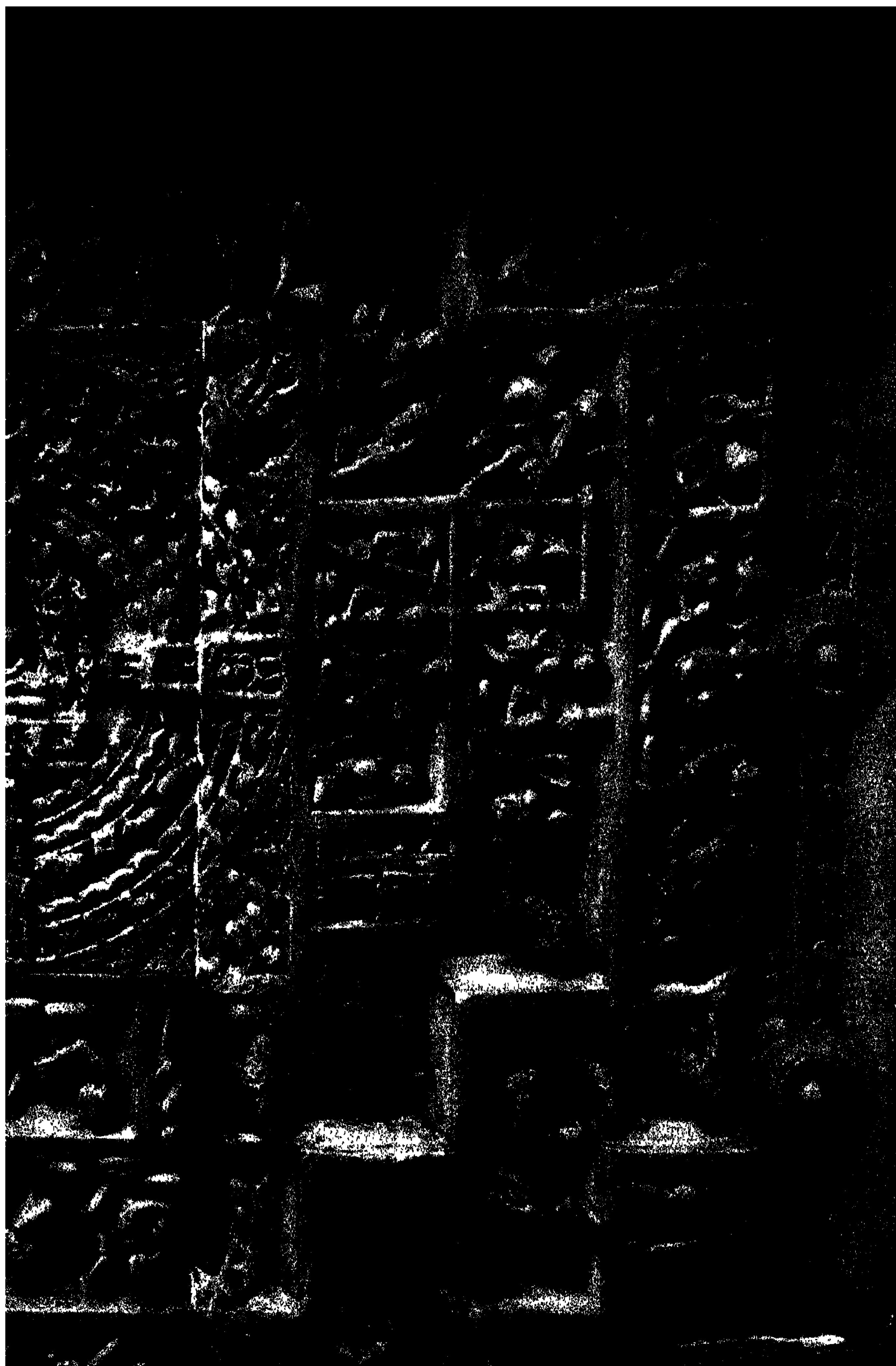
The eight *dikpālas* — 'the guardians of the quarters' — are represented on the walls or ceilings of the temples. The Jain *dikpālas* are similar to the Brahmanical pantheon: Indra, Agni, Yama, Nirṛti, Varuṇa, Vāyu, Kubera and Īśāna. In the Vimalavasāhi temple, the eight *dikpālas* are carved in standing attitude in a corridor ceiling. They are four-armed and appear in their correct order, from Indra to Īśāna, with their distinctive attributes and *vāhanas*. Here Yama holds a pen and Vāyu carries banners.

Naigameṣin, an attendant of Indra, has a special place in the Śvetāmbara tradition of Jainism for, according to the legend, he transferred the embryo of the future Mahāvīra from the womb of Brahmāṇī Sunandā to a more propitious womb, that of royal



Basal corner in the *raṅgamaṇḍapa* in the Vimalavasahi temple, an image of Ambikā, seated in *lalitāsana* on her lion mount. The four-armed goddess holds bunches of mango tree in her three hands and a child in the fourth. On the marble beam delineating the corner is carved a *kalpavalli*, 'a creeper that fulfils all wishes'.





Kṣatriyāṇī Triśalā. The Jain legend tells us that Śakra himself brought the infant *tīrthaṅkara* to the top of Mount Meru, the mountain of gods, for the divine bath. Joining a host of nymphs, the 'Lord of Celestials' himself danced; and Indra and Ajātaśatru, a great ruler on earth and a contemporary of Mahāvīra, waved the *caurī* before the *tīrthaṅkara.*

Though the legend of the transfer of the embryo by Naigameṣin is narrated in the context of Mahāvīra, but it is associated with other *tīrthaṅkaras* as well. Naigameṣin has the body of a hūman being and the face of a goat. He is shown in the eleventh course in the *raṅgamaṇḍapa* in Vimalavasāhi, as well as on two ceilings in the portico adjacent to the *raṅgamaṇḍapa* in Lunavasāhi.

The Pratihāras are shown as door-guardians, or are presented on pillar-shafts. Both *kinnaras,* whose lower half is like that of a bird and the upper half corresponds to a human being, and *vidyādharas* — 'the denizens of the air' — adorn the ceilings, or support the *vidyādevīs* as bracket figures.

> The universe is in the shape of a man standing in the *vaisaha* posture, with his hands on his hips, filled with substance having the characteristics of permanence, origination, perishing; at the bottom resembling a cane stand, in the middle a *jhallari,* and at the top a *muraja* composed as follows: It is filled with three worlds and its first world are seven earths surrounded by very strong, thick water...The three worlds are classified into lower, middle and upper...
>
> —*Triṣaṣṭiśalākāpuruṣacaritra,* vol. I[11]

The Jain cosmology perceives the universe in the shape of a man, with a body like an hour-glass; the top part resembles a *muraja,* a kind of cylindrical drum; the middle part has the shape of a cymbal — a *jhallari* — or a circular shape.

This universe is filled with different beings at different levels. The gods and goddesses dwell in the upper world of the highest heavens, and they perform many tasks: as guardian spirits of the *tīrthaṅkaras,* as their attendants, as performers of their worship, as guardians of directions, as players of divine music and as goddesses of magic. As such, they comprise a pantheon of deities with prescribed duties, status and appearances. These divine beings are divided into the following classes:

I. Gods of the lower world
   a. *Bhavanapati* (underground beings and elements of nature etc.)
   b. *Vyantara* (beings of the woods and the atmosphere)
   c. *Jyotiṣka* (the heavenly bodies, stars, planets, etc.)

On pages 20-21

Pañcakalyāṇaka — five auspicious events in the life of a *jina,* on a ceiling in the Pārśvanātha temple, Kumbharia, Rajasthan. Also shown are Naigameṣin, with goat head, and goddess Lakṣmī, in fourteen auspicious dreams.

II. Gods of the middle world (*vidyādhara, vidyādevī,* etc.)
III. Gods of the upper world (*vaimānika*, heaven-dwellers, Indra, etc.)

Literary sources provide invaluable information regarding the canons and symbolism of Jain architecture, but cosmographical literature is much more comprehensive in this regard.

Both cosmology and cosmography have an important place in Jain mythological scriptures. The cosmos, eternally existent by nature, is comprised of six types of substances, *dravyas*, categorised as *jīva* and *ajīva*, animate and inanimate.

The cosmos is generally referred to as *loka;* it is materially mathematical and geometrical in the whole as well as in parts, and is shaped like a man standing akimbo with the legs spread sideways. The space inside the cosmos is called *lokākāśa* and outside *alokākāśa*. The Siddha-śilā is the space of the liberated souls; it is the summit of the cosmos. The central part of the cosmos is *manūṣya-loka* where the humans inhabit. It consists of innumerable continents or *dvīpas;* except for Jambudvipa, each encircled by an ocean.

Jambudvipa has seven regions, amongst them are Bhārata, Himāvata and Airāvata. The celestial beings or Devas are of four orders, of which only the Vaimānikas reside in the upper world called *svarga-loka*. Various celestial beings like *yakṣa, yakṣīs, śāsanadevas, śāsanadevīs, dikpālas, kṣetrapālas, Bhairavas, Vidyādevīs,* Sarasvatī, Lakṣmī, Gaṅgā, Yamunā, *apsarās, dundūbhi-vādaka, camara-dharins, cāmara-dharinis,* etc., and the human figures like Pārśvadharas, Bhaktas, etc. can be seen as attendants to the *tīrthaṅkaras* in various parts of the Jain temples.

It should be noted that symbolising myths, cosmographical details or descriptions as presented in the Jain or other canons, is almost impossible for an architect or a sculptor to achieve. What is achieved instead are broad impressions or highlights.

In the design and architecture of temples, a certain spirit for elaboration and multiplication seems to have been at work with the Jains for generations. They have built large temple-cities at various sacred spots particularly in the mountains: Satrunjaya and Girnar in Gujarat, Mount Abu in Rajasthan, Vindhyagiri (Sravanabelgola) in Karnataka, Parasnath (Sametasikhara) in Bihar.

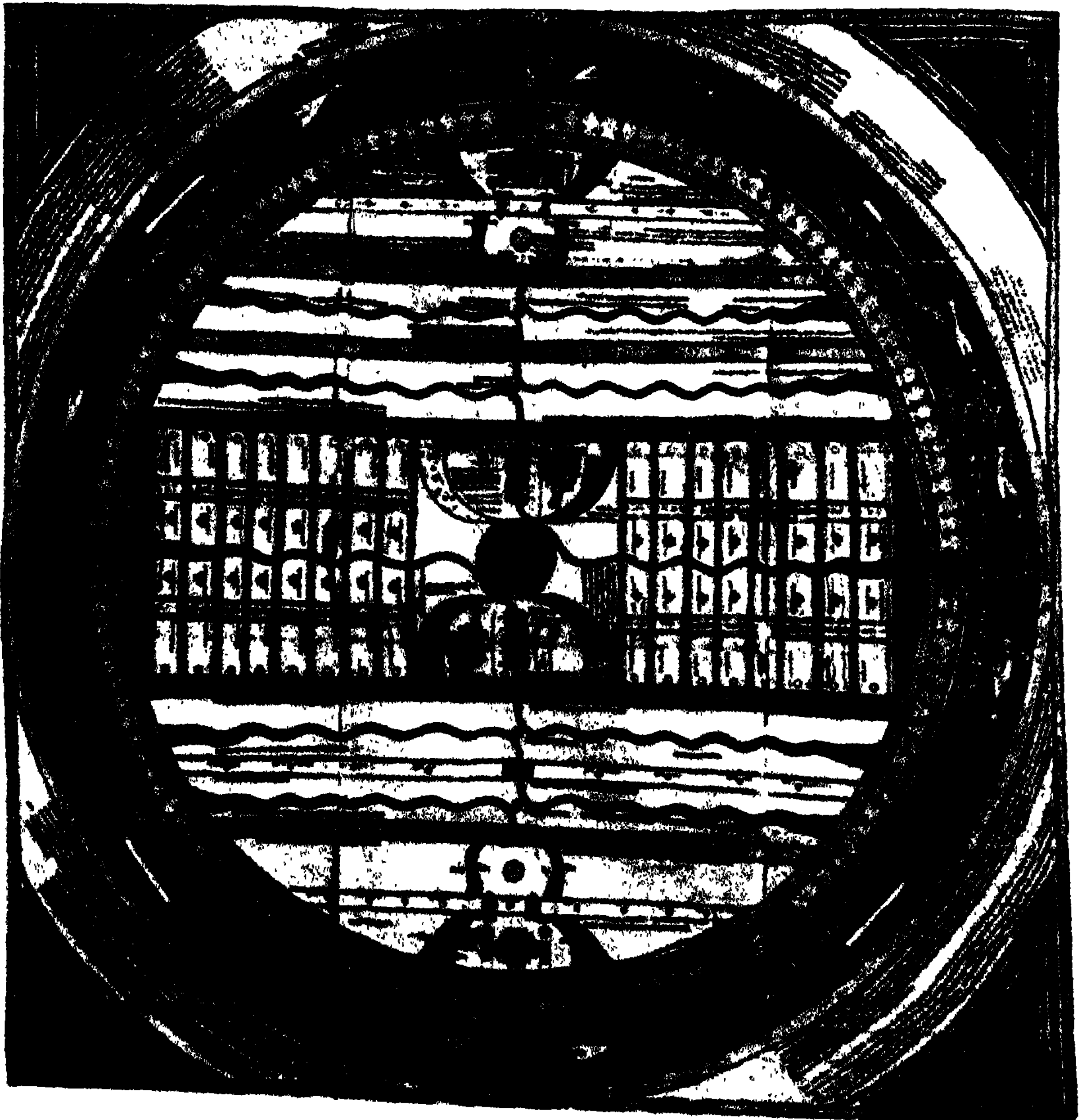
Vidyādharas and Vidyādevīs

From the third course of the dome in the *raṅgamaṇḍapa* in the Vimalavasāhi temple project out sixteen square brackets, each carrying a figure of four- or six-armed *vidyādhara,* each playing on some musical instrument and holding a lotus, a knife and a shield.

These brackets support a complete set of images of sixteen *Mahāvidyās* or *vidyādevīs*. The *vidyādevīs* have four arms each and are represented in the standing attitude, with their specific attributes and cognizances. Amongst these are Mānavī and Mahāmānasī, the latter mounting a lion.

Yakṣas and Yakṣīs

From about the middle of the sixth century a *śāsanadevatā* pair — *yakṣa* and *yakṣī* — had been introduced on or near the pedestal of the *jina* image. The pair consisted of a Kubera-like two-armed *yakṣa* called Sarvānubhūti, usually carrying a citron and a money-bag, and the two-armed *yakṣī* Ambikā, generally holding a bunch of mangoes in her right hand and a child on her left lap with her left hand.



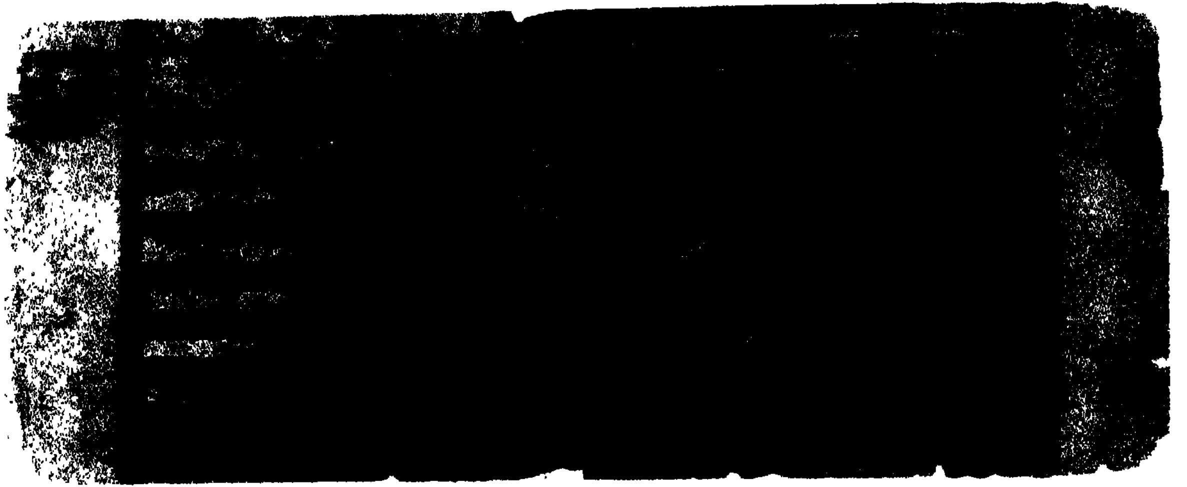
Jambūdvīpa: 'the island of the rose-apple tree'. The disc of Jambūdvīpa is set within its rampart of diamonds, which is surrounded by a fence of jewels crowned by a high garland of lotuses made from the gems.

Gouache on cloth, 16th century, Gujarat.

Courtesy: Ravi Kumar, *The Jain Cosmology*.



Sixteen-armed goddess Sarasvatī seated in *lalitāsana* on a corridor ceiling in the Vimalavasāhi temple. She holds, amongst other things, a lotus, a conch, *vīṇā, varadamudrā, abhayamudrā,* a book and a pitcher. To her right is a six-armed male dancer and on her left a six-armed drummer Below is a figural band depicting a goat, a boar, etc. On the top there is a sculptural panel depicting Gaja-Lakṣmī in the centre and four male divinities in niches on her each side.



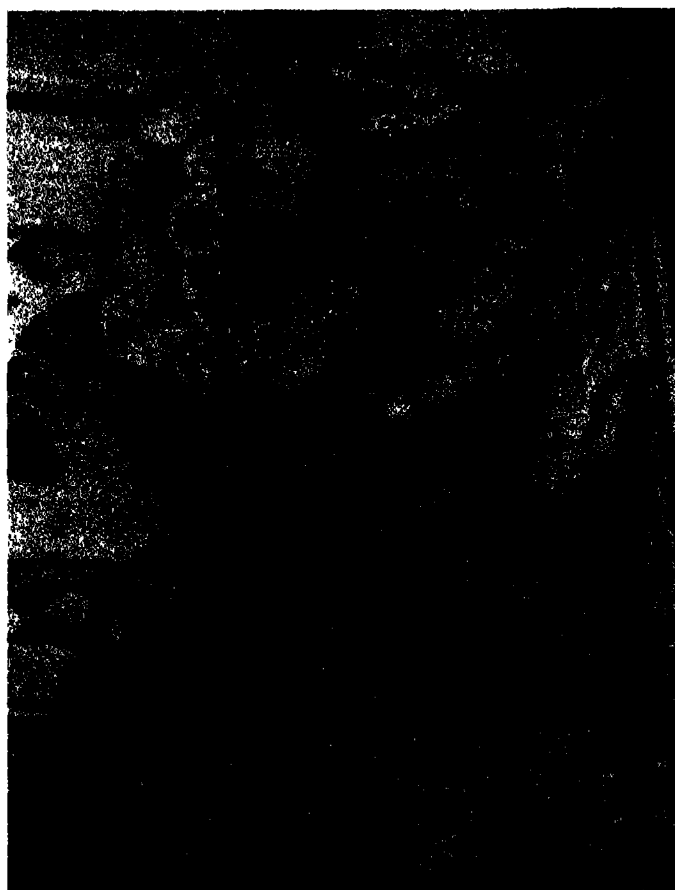
Birth of Mahāvīra, Gujarat, 15th century. Folio from Kalpasūtra manuscript.



Eight auspicious symbols.



Sixteen *vidyadharas* in the *rangamandapa* in the Lunavasāhi temple They are playing different musical instruments



As is evident from figures on the pedestals in some of the *devakulikās* in the Vimalavasāhi temple, this pair of *yakṣa* and *yakṣī* continued to be associated with all the *tīrthaṅkaras*. In later iconography, after the twelfth century, Ambikā was given two more arms, and she began to appear on the doorframes of the sanctums of the main shrine and the *devakulikās*.

Notes

1. Sravana Belgola Inscription no. 258(108) in Siddhara Basti, dated A.D. 1432. *Epigraphia Carnatica*, vol. II. Text, p. 128, translation, p. 116.
2. As quoted in *Jaina Art and Architecture*, vol. I.
3. For introduction to Jainism, see *Jaina Art and Architecture*, vols. I, II, III.
4. *Indian Sculpture*, p. 44.
5. Quoted by Pereira, *J. Monolithic Jinas*, p. xiv.
6. Pal, P. *Sensuous Sculpture*, p. 11.
7. *Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization*, p. 78.
8. Quoted by Ghosh, *Jaina Art and Architecture*, vol. I, p. 38.
9. Op. cit., p. 78.
10. See Shah, U.P. *Jaina-Rupa-Mandana*, pp. 246-255.
11. As quoted by Jain and Fischer, *Jaina Iconography*, vol. I.

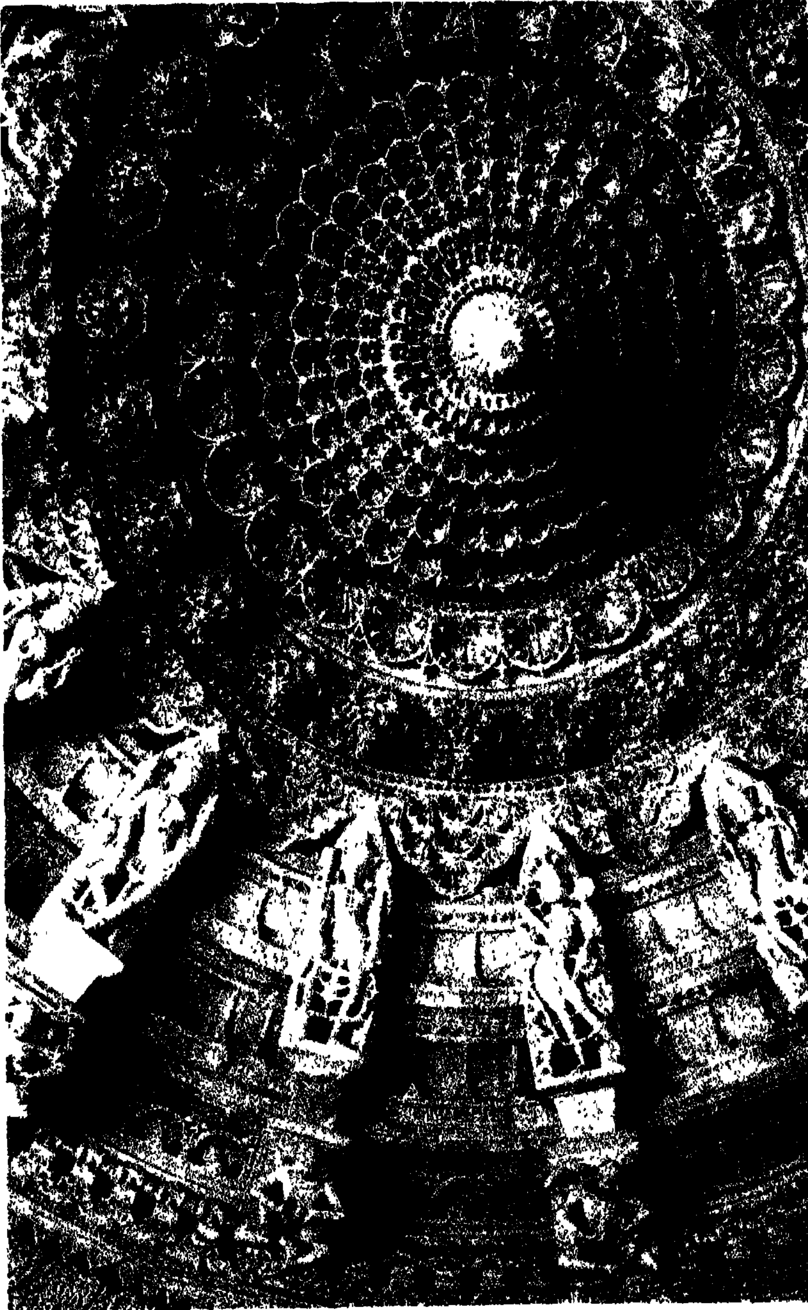
Chapter II

The Thousand-Petalled Lotus

Lotus in Art and Worship

Prior to the sky, prior to this earth, prior to the living gods, what is that germ which the waters held first and in which all the gods existed? The waters held the same germ in which all the gods exist or find themselves; on the navel of the Unborn stood that in which all beings stood.

—*Ṛgveda*, I.24.7[1]

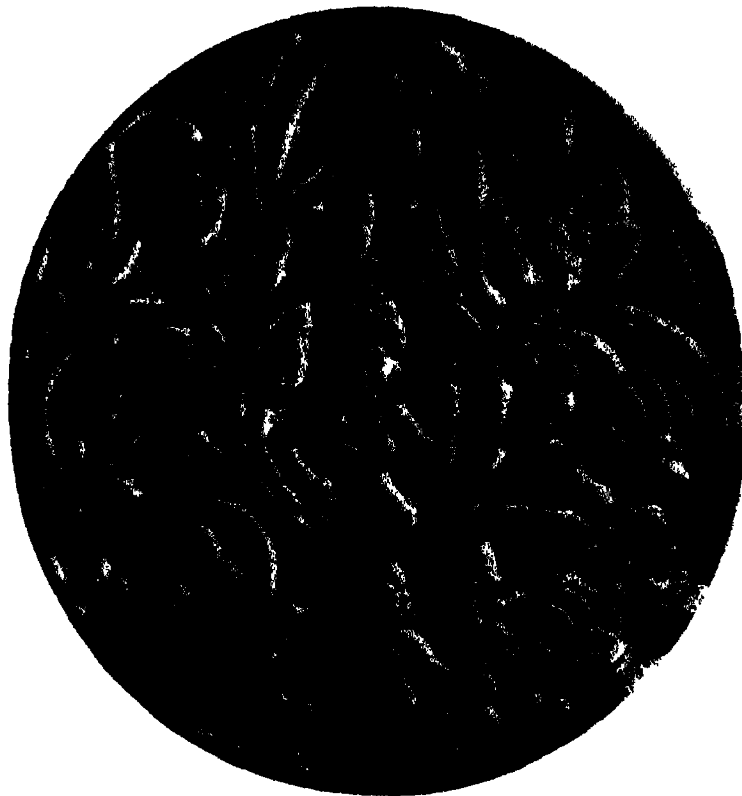


The main dome in the *raṅgamaṇḍapa* in the Lunavasāhi temple, with different number of *vidyādevīs*.

Viśvakarmā — the architect of the universe and god of all craftsmen and artisans — emerges from the navel of the Unborn, in the waters. Viṣṇu — Nārāyaṇa — reclines on a couch of serpents, floating in the cosmic waters. He is called *Padmanābha* — 'the lotus-naveled'; from his navel springs a lotus on which creator-god Brahma sits and brings forth the universe. "All birth, all coming into existence, is in fact 'being established in the Waters' and to be 'established' is to stand on any ground — *prithivi* — or platform of existence; he who stands or sits upon the Lotus 'lives'."[2]

In India the universe has been conceived as a 'many-petalled lotus' — *utpalla-padma* — in the centre of which sits the deity. It is said that 'the Lord created the lotus in front of him; then he sat on it and meditated upon the first origin.' In the Vedas, the goddess Lakṣmī is praised as *padma sambhava* — 'lotus born', *padmākṣi* — 'lotus eyed', 'adorned with lotus garlands' — *padmamālinī*, 'to whom the lotus is dear' — *padma priya*. She has even been called as 'the one who reveals the nature of the lotus'.[3]

Throughout the length and breadth of India, and in the vast history of her artistic and spiritual traditions — Hindu, Buddhist and Jain — the lotus is the most pervasive symbol and metaphor. It is likened to the human heart and is said to be 'born of the



Lakṣmī, the goddess of wealth and fertility, with her flower, the lotus.

Bharhut, 2nd century B.C. Stone.

light of the constellations'. It has thus a thousand different meanings. It is the womb of the universe, the seat of generation and regeneration; it is symbol of fecundity. It signifies prosperity and youth. It invokes images of purity and beauty. It suggests detachment and wisdom.

Lotus is a magical plant; no wonder it evokes such rich poetic and spiritual metaphors. Though it grows and blossoms on earth, in water and amidst light, it enacts their transmutation from earth to light, from mud to scent, through water to gleaming colour in the regularity of its shape and its movements, opening and closing with the measure of time, of days and nights. When the seeds of other plants are ripe, the bursting of the pod releases them, and they fall to the ground and germinate. For the lotus, however, it is different. The ripe seeds, instead of falling from the pod, remain in the cells where they have grown. Within these cells, whose openings are too small to let them out, the seeds send forth the young seedlings. The seed pot is their matrix until they are large enough to burst open their cells. The seedlings then sink to the bottom of the water where they take root in the mud.



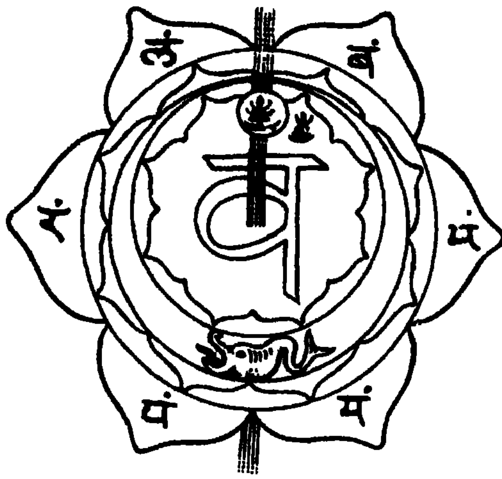
Details from a scroll-painting of the meditative centres, *cakras*.
Ink and gouache on paper, 17th century, Rajasthan.
Courtesy: Ajit Mookerjee, *Yoga Art*



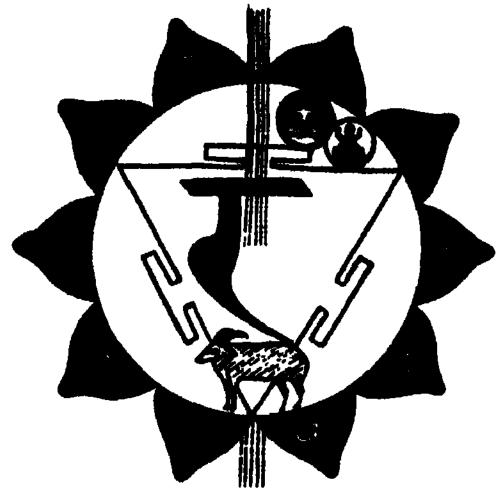
Visnu, inside the cosmic egg, reclining in a couch of serpents, with Lakṣmī, the goddess of fecundity.



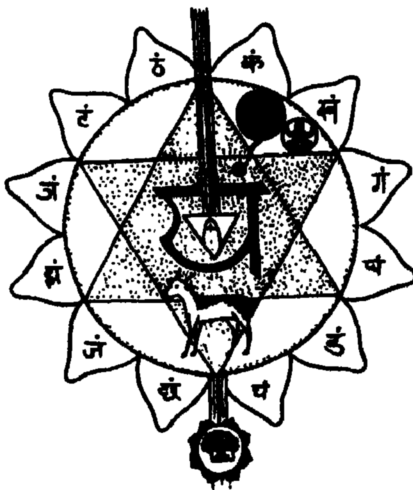
Lotus emerging from the navel of Viṣṇu, and Brahma sitting on it



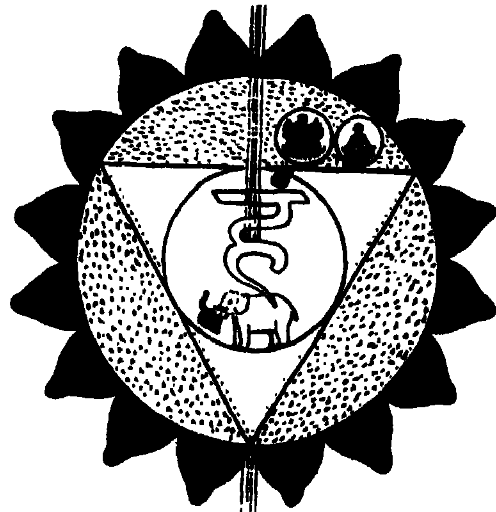
Svadishthana Chakra.



Manipura Chakra.

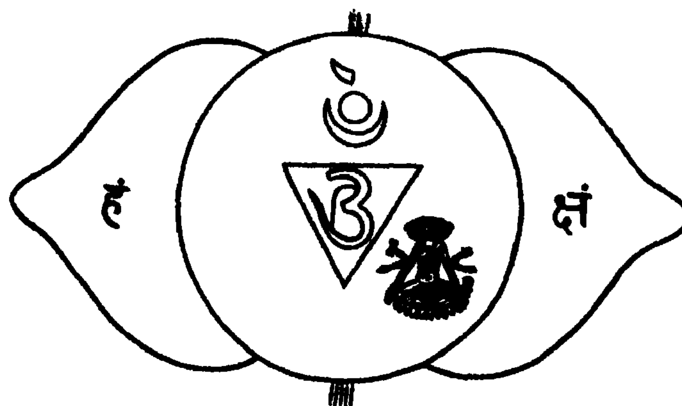


Anahata Chakra.



Vishuddha Chakra.

Ajna Chakra.



This self-fertilising power has its seat within the flower. There, high above the muddy ground, above the water, the whole cycle of vegetation is accomplished. Within the pericarp is held the continuity from bud to fruit and again to the new, young plant; the beginning and the end and the new beginning once more. The centre of productivity and the cycle of generation reside above, in the flower. The earth below, the mud, is but the intermediate ground for the root. Productivity and generation above are one continuous process within the lotus flower.

As the dead leaf when its time is up
falls from the tree to the ground,
so is the life of man.

. . .

As the dewdrop that sways on a blade of grass
lasts but a moment,
so is the life of man.

. . .

So cast away all attachments,
and be pure as a lotus,
or as water in autumn.

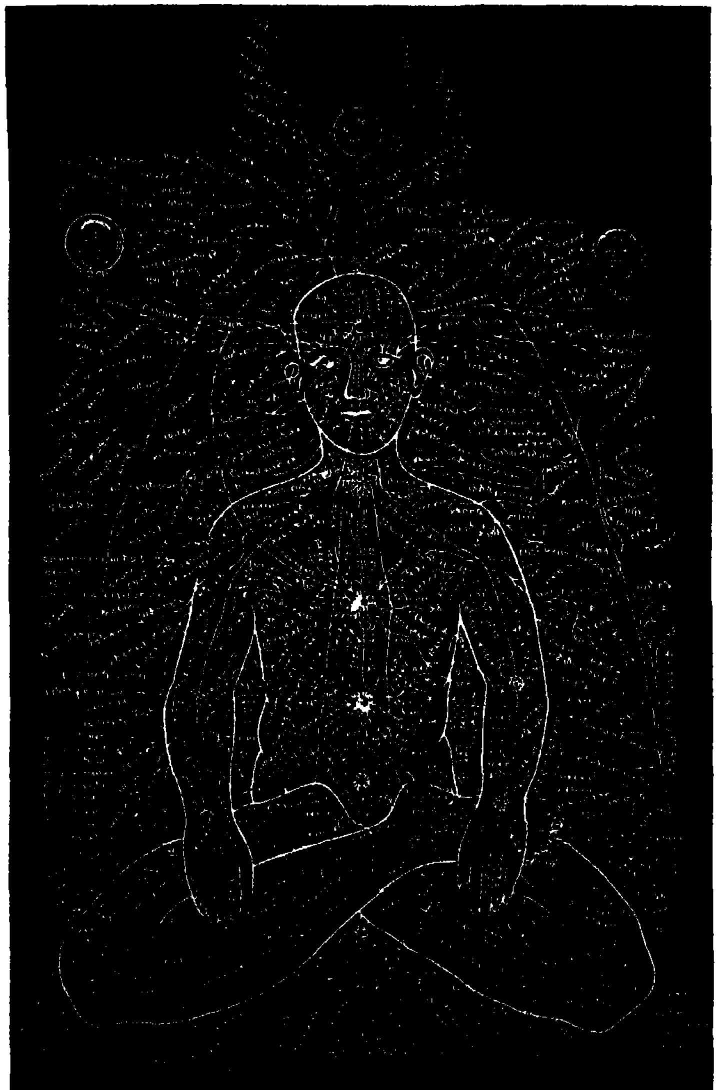
—Mahāvīra[4]

Yogi and representation of various *cakras*, ink on paper, 19th century, Bihar.

Courtesy: Kalyana, Gita Press.

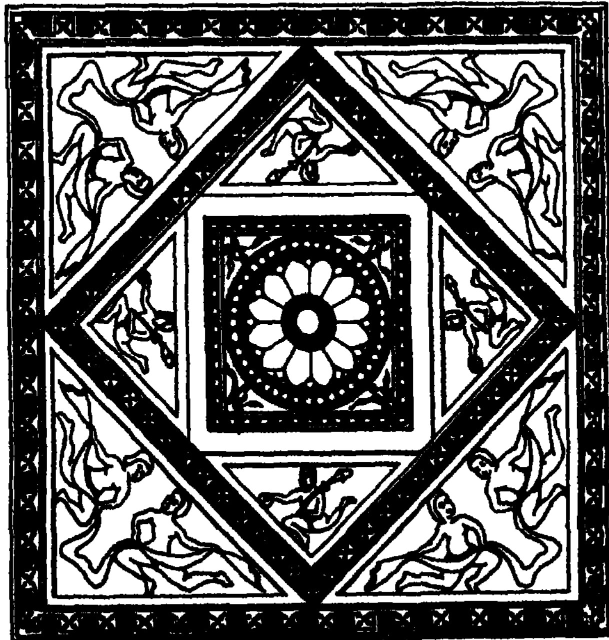
Sūrya, with broken hands and lotuses, 12th century, Konark.

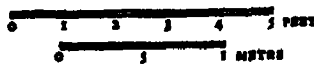






Drawing of wall-painting in a post-Gupta Jain temple at Sittanvasal. The drawing represents a celestial region in the form of a pond in which *apsaras*, geese, elephants, etc. are sporting in a thicket of enormous lotus-blossoms and fronds [After B. Rowland].





Lantern roof at Shiva Temple, Pandrenthan: Plan and section [After B. Rowland].

The most pervasive meaning of lotus in the Indian sacred arts is that of a spiritually enlightened being such as the Buddha or Mahāvīra, who, like the lotus, has risen from the mire of earthly temptations, and has blossomed fully, untainted by muddled existence of lower levels:

> Just as, Brethren, a lotus, born in water,
> full-grown in the water, rises to the
> surface and is not wetted by the
> water; even so, Brethren, the
> Tathagata, born in the world,
> full-grown in the world,
> surpasses the world, and is
> unaffected by the world.
> —The Buddha[5]

The legend has it that as a new-born child, the Buddha took seven steps to announce his spiritual sovereignty over the earth. His seven steps are represented in art by seven lotuses. Later, after



The ascending stages of consciousness, from *Mūldhara* to *Sahasrara*, the seat of enlightenment. This is symbolized by the mantra *Om*, shown at the summit.
Gouache on paper, 17th century, Uttar Pradesh.
Courtesy: Ajit Mookerjee, *Yoga Art*.



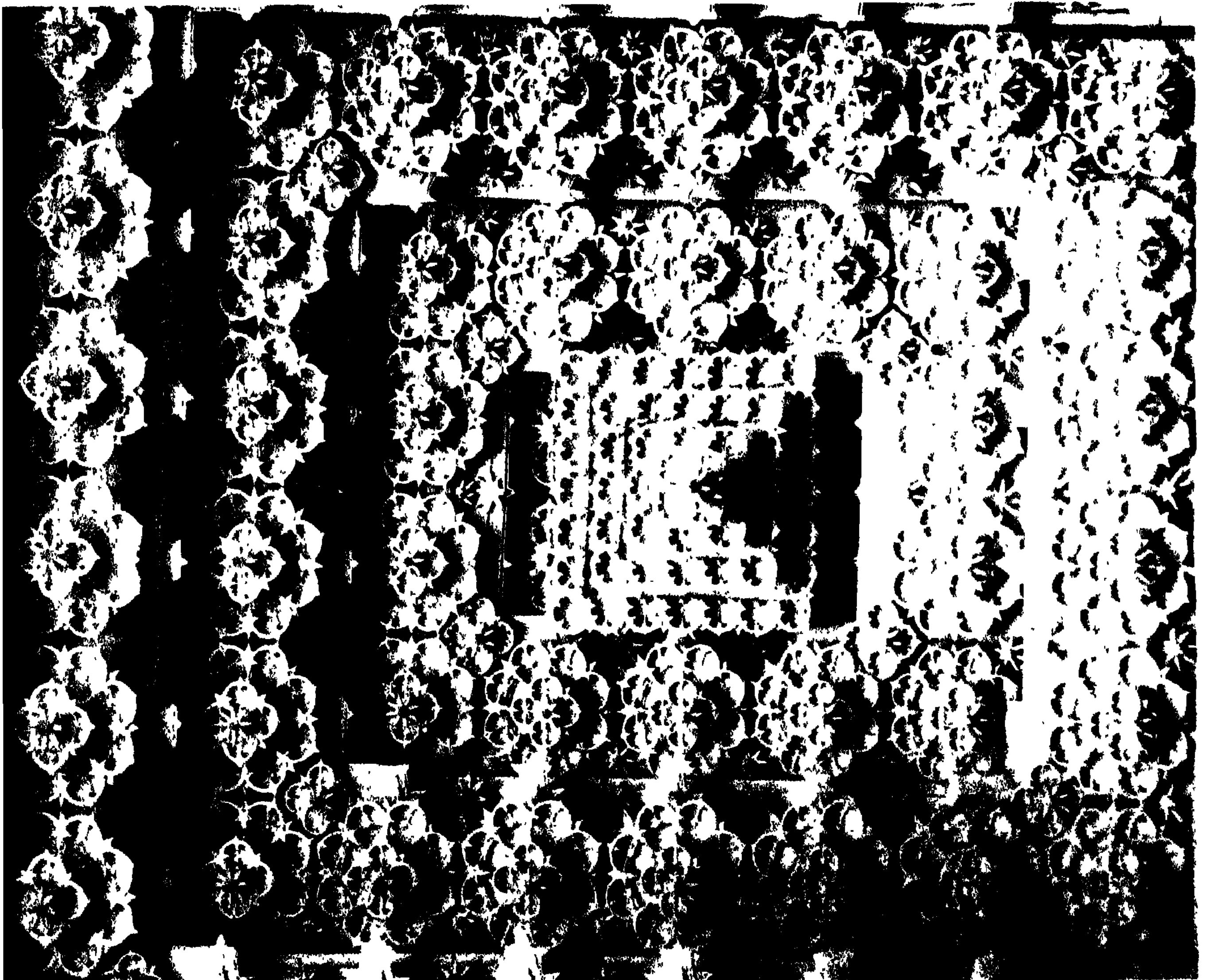
Infant Kṛṣṇa in a lotus.
Miniature, Kulu, c. 1700.
Private collection.

his Awakening under the Bodhi tree, the Buddha is said to have been moved to infinite compassion for his fellow-beings. He saw them like stems and buds of a lotus in the lake — some immersed in the mud, others just coming out of it or just appearing above the water, and still others beginning to blossom. Seeing this he determined to bring them all to full bloom and to the bearing of fruit. The Buddha thus was invested with the miraculous power of imprinting the image of a lotus flower on the earth at every step that he took.

By the second century B.C., in its various artistic manifestations, the lotus was not only the abode of the goddess Śrī-Lakṣmī, but also her principal attribute.

By the beginning of the Gupta period in the third century the lotus had become the principal seat for most deities — of the Hindus, Jains and Buddhists. In many instances, the lotus serves as the principal decorative motif on their halos. The lotus also came to be held in their hands, by Sūrya — the sun god, by Viṣṇu,

A ceiling in a bay in the Lunavasāhi temple. It is composed of three rectangular courses and a square *padmaśilā*. The underside of the courses beautifully depicts a file of projecting *lūmās*. This ceiling is quite unique in this temple.



the Buddhist Avalokiteśvara and Tārā, and several of Jain tīrthaṅkaras. A red lotus is the emblem of the sixth Jain *tīrthaṅkara* Padmasambhava, and a blue lotus of the twenty-first *tīrthaṅkara* Neminātha.

The self-fertilising power of the lotus makes it a symbol of the androgynous creative god that gives 'life to matter'; thus it is also symbolic of goddess earth — *Bhudevī*. As the birthplace of Lakṣmī and of the Creator-god Brahmā himself, the lotus becomes the metaphoric womb of creation, and the womb of the Universe. "Though itself of ancient inception", writes Maury, "the lotus emblem appears to have been an elaboration of a pre-existent, simpler design: a floral configuration of the circle, always and everywhere the elementary ideograph of the female organs, subsumed in India by the term *yoni*. This role as the fundamental allegory of female sexuality has endowed the flower with its aura of sacred mystery and imparted to its diagrammatic abstraction a dimension of the Cosmic. Whether in hylic or emblematic form, the lotus has come to present the ultimate equation of female being and female magic: its petals enclose the magic of generation and regeneration, its centre is the omphalos of the universe, the source and substance of life itself."[6]

Fire is verily the lotus of this Earth,
the Sun the lotus of the yonder Sky.

—*Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*[7]

The lotus blooms every day with the rising sun and closes its petals in the evenings. Thus it not only symbolises the endless cycle of life and death but also the cosmic cycle of birth and dissolution of the universe. The lotus thus is an appropriate iconographic symbol of *Sūrya*. Sūrya has often two lotuses in his hands, symbolising the upper, *pāra*, and nether, *apāra*, waters, "representing respectively the possibilities of existence 'above' or 'below' in yonder world and this world, Heaven and Earth."[8]

This also suggests why many of the gods from the Gupta period on, but specially the Buddhas and the Jain *tīrthaṅkaras* are given a lotus halo behind their heads as well as a lotus support below their feet, one symbolising the heaven and the other the earth, "the two flowers, one behind the 'head' and the other beneath the 'feet', and each a reflection of the other, representing the grounds of existence *in extenso*...between them."[9]

At another level the lotus represents earth and water, and thus it is an appropriate attribute of Śrī-Lakṣmī, the earth mother personifying all possibilities of existence and abundance.

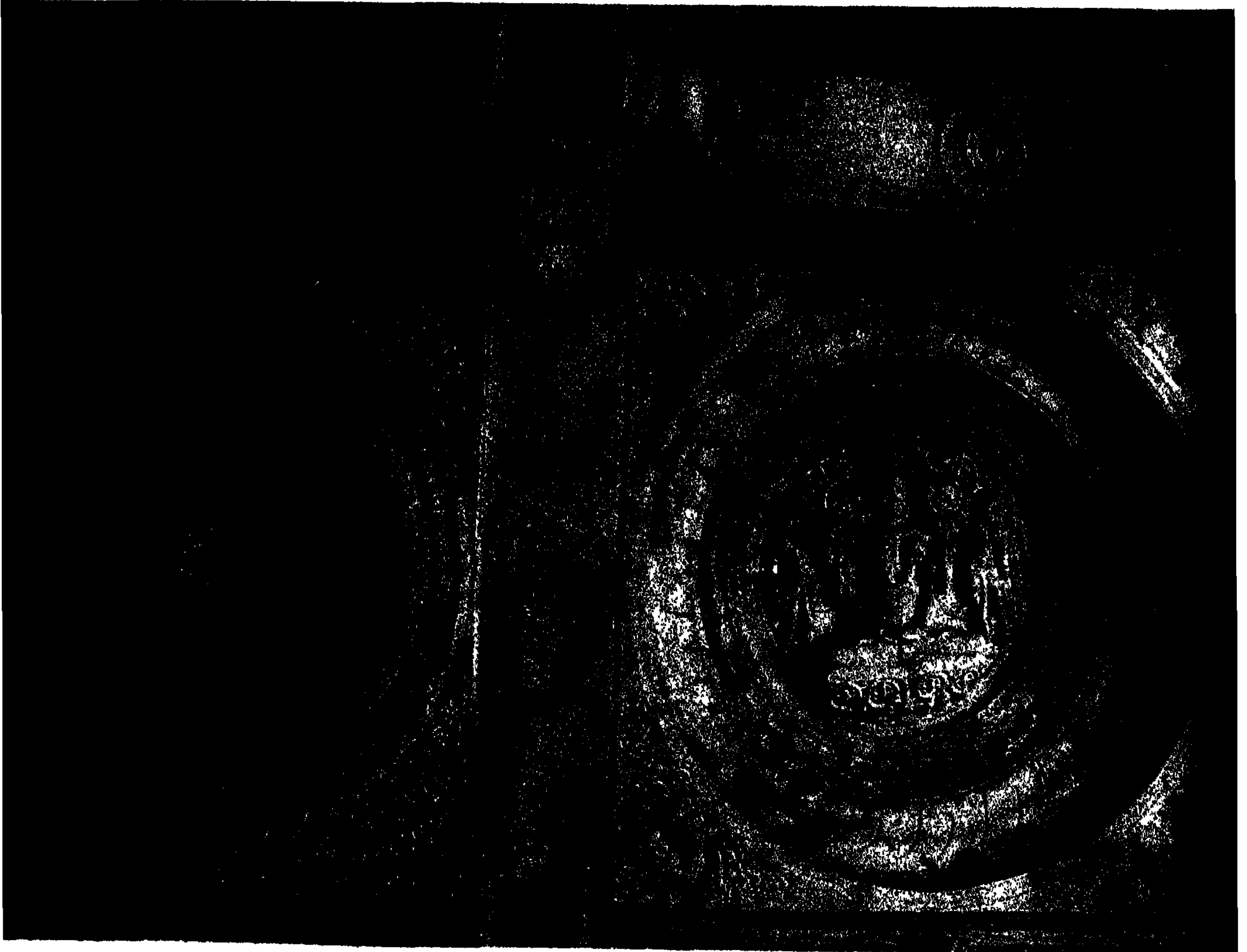
She is described as *padmavāsini*, 'dweller in the lotus' and *puṣṭida*, 'provider of the nourishment'. A frequently used Sanskrit word for lotus is *puṣkara*, with the same root as *puṣṭi* meaning nourishment. Śrī-Lakṣmī is shown in early Indian art as *Gaja-Lakṣmī*, being bathed by elephants symbolising the sky.



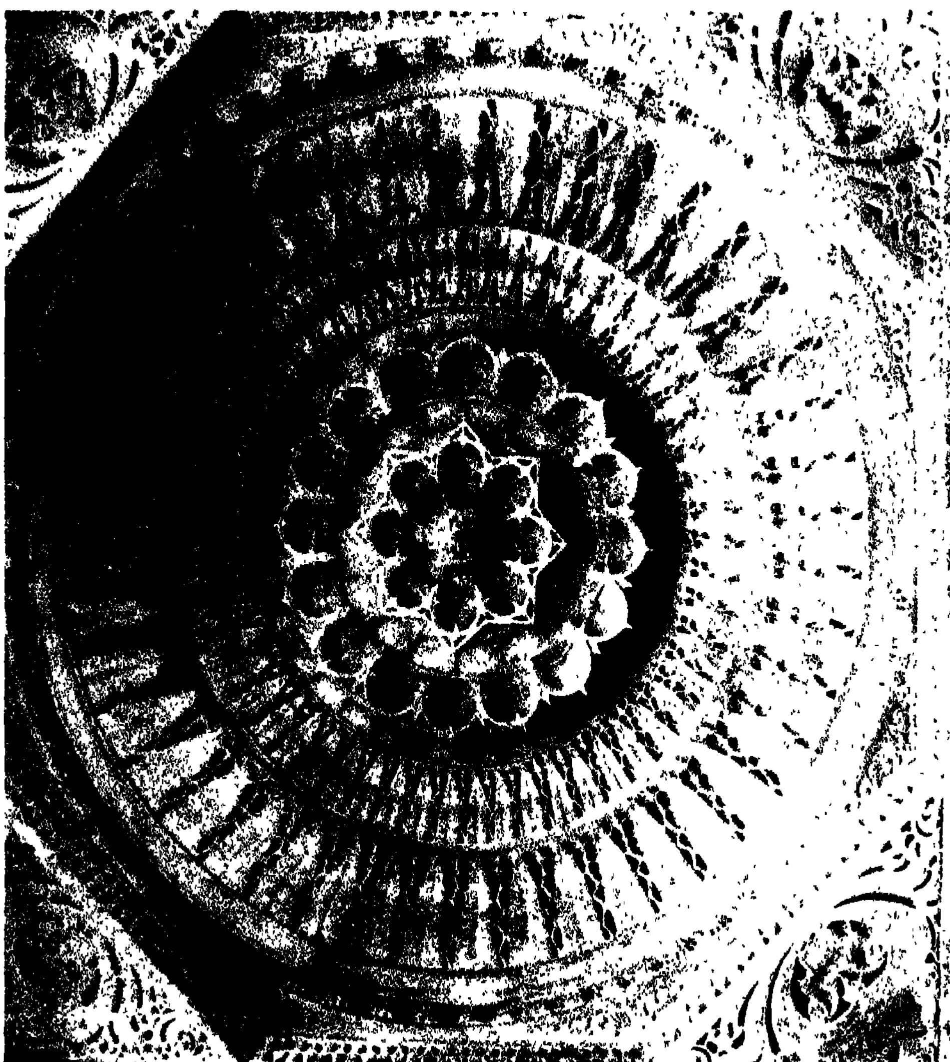
A domical ceiling in the portico in the Vimalavasāhi temple On its four corners are dancing figures *Torana*-arches, the dome of the *rangamaṇḍapa*, and goddess Ambikā in the basal corner can also be seen.

The sky, in turn, showers rain, fertilising the earth represented by the goddess herself and the lotus on which she stands. This act is a kind of conception, and is similar to the conception of Māyādevī, mother of the Buddha, who dreamed that the future emancipator had entered her womb as white elephant. Immediately after his birth the infant and the mother were bathed by two *nāgas*, which refers to both 'serpent' and 'elephant'.

The lotus also symbolises, as Pal eloquently outlines, the firmament, or middle space — *antarikṣa* — which is why the gods are frequently placed on lotuses. The idea is first expressed in Ṛgveda in connection with the births of the fire god, Agni, and sage Vaśiṣṭha, which the gods are said to have watched while seated on lotuses. Viṣṇu's navel, from which a lotus emerges, is the centre of the universe; the navel of the world form of *Prajāpati*, an appellation of the Supreme Being, is said to be the firmament.[10]



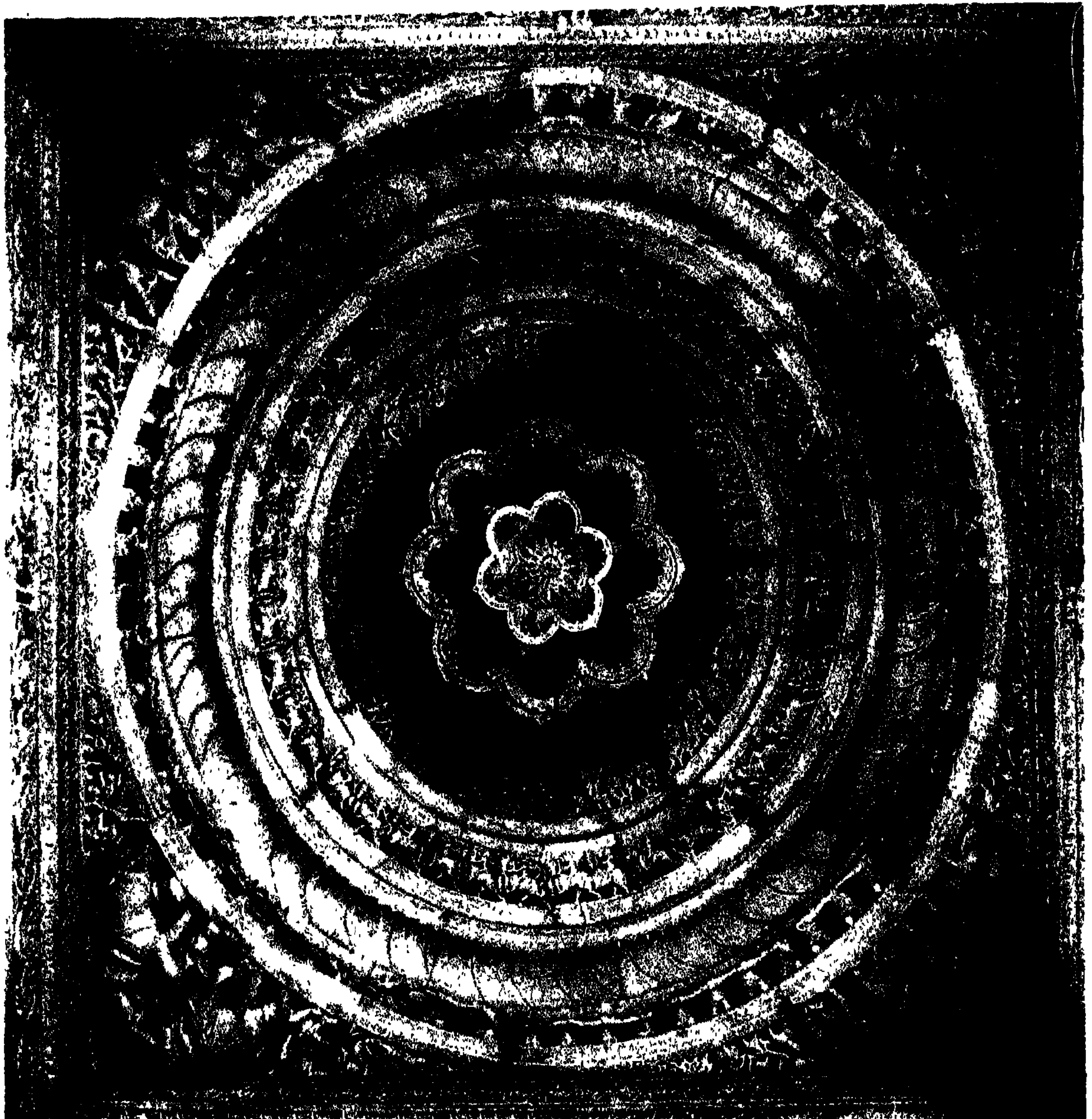
Lakṣmī on a south portico ceiling in the Vimalavasāhi temple. The ceiling is shallow domical consisting of four circular courses. The fourth course is flat and has a graceful image of four-armed Gaja-Lakṣmī, seated in *padmāsana* on a pedestal supported by stemmed lotus and water vases. In upper hands, she holds lotus plants, with elephants engraved in them; her lower hands are in *dhyānamudrā*. Two *caurī*-bearers stand on her either side, and two *vidyādharas* hover in the upper section with garlands.



The significance of the lotus as a divine attribute held in the hand can vary according to who is holding it. The lotus emerging from Viṣṇu's navel symbolises the earth, while the stalk represents the cosmic mountain Meru, the axis of the universe. In Viṣṇu's hand, the lotus symbolises water, in Śrī-Lakṣmī's hand, wealth. When goddess Pārvatī holds the lotus the flower symbolises detachment, while in Indra's hand it signifies prosperity. The flower also represents the idea of divine play. The universe and all its manifestations are often characterised as nothing but reflections of the Supreme Being's playfulness.

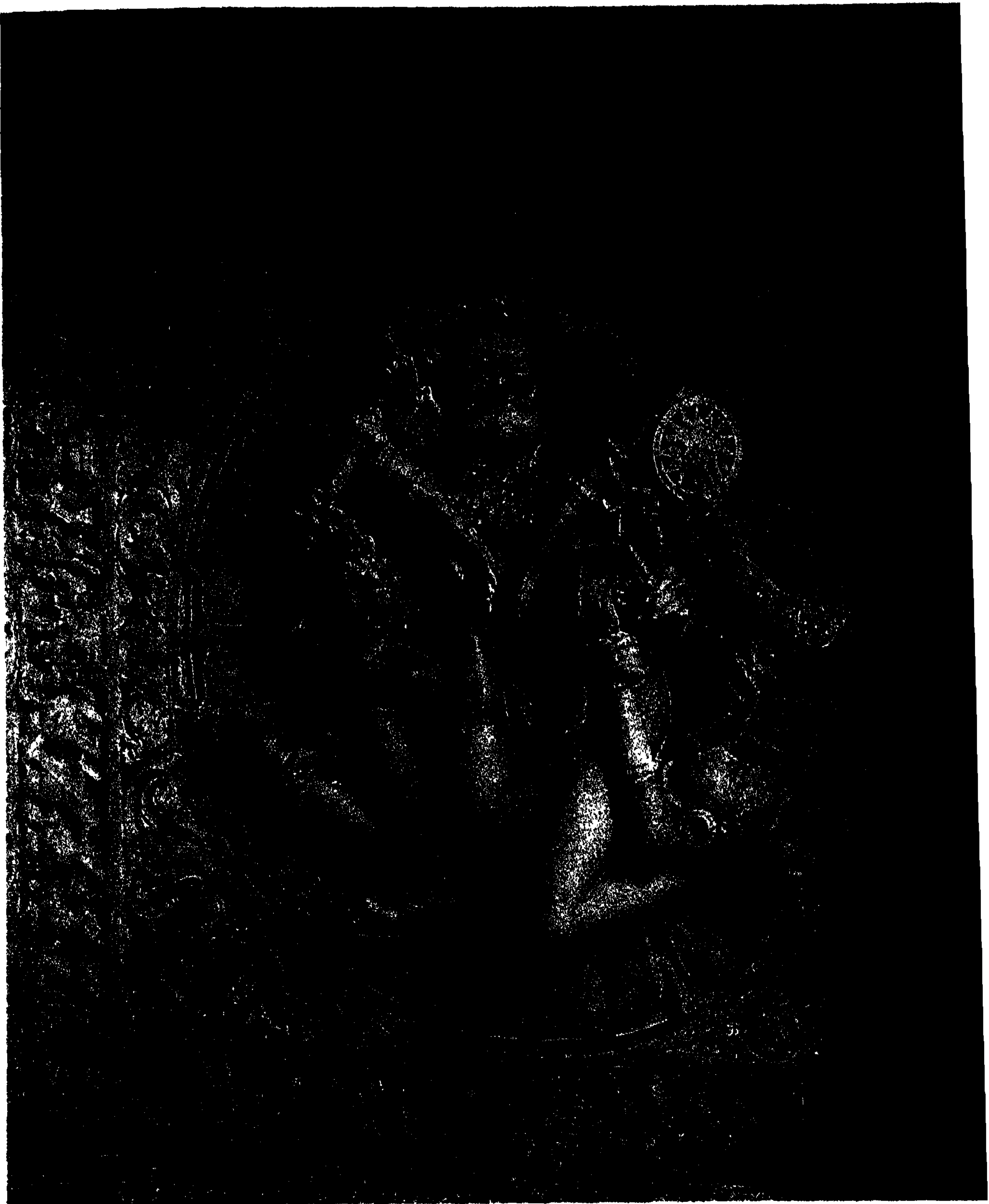
The close association of Viṣṇu and the lotus is evident from such epithets as *Padmanābha* — 'lotus-naveled', *Pundarikṣa* — 'lotus-eyed', *Padmapāni* — 'lotus-handed', also the epithet for Buddhist saviour-god Avalokiteśvara. The Buddhists may have first adopted the lotus as both a divine seat and an emblem held

A domical ceiling in north portico with five courses in the Lunavasāhi temple.



A domical ceiling, with several circular courses, in the south portico in the Vimalavasāhi temple. On one corner there is a an image of *lalitāsana* Gaja-Lakṣmī.

by a deity. By the second century the lotus was adopted as a seat for the Buddha himself, certainly in Gandhara and probably in Mathura as well as in Buddhist monuments in Andhra. The flower was given to the *bodhisattva* Avalokiṭeśvara long before it became an emblem of Viṣṇu. In early Buddhist literature the lotus is used as a metaphor for essence (*pudgala; pundarikā*), and one of the early *Mahāyāna* texts is called the 'Lotus of the True Religion' or *Padma Sūtra*. Thus in the Buddhist context the lotus symbolises the faith itself and would be an appropriate attribute for Avalokiṭeśvara. In later Buddhist iconography the lotus certainly is often used as a support for other emblems such



Sixteen-armed Narasimha, an *avatār* of Viṣṇu, tearing the belly of demon Hiranyakaśyapa on a corridor ceiling in the Vimalavasāhi temple Narasimha holds a mace and a disc in his two hands, two other hands are raised over his head; with the rest he is destroying the demon The sculpture is carved in high relief in the centre of a sixteen-petalled lotus flower. The whole piece is surrounded by a rectangular panel border depicting *sāgar manthan,* 'churning of the ocean'

Narasiṁha is considered the embodiment of knowledge; he destroys ignorance when he tears at the bosom of the demon. Ignorance or impurity is of three kinds related to body, speech and mind, and Narasimha destroys all three of them This interpretation may be applicable to all demons destroyed by the gods

as the thunderbolt or book, while the most widely uttered incantation associated with Avalokiteśvara is *Om mani padme hum,* meaning 'Om, the jewel in the lotus'.

In an eighteenth-century watercolour from Thailand, the Buddha is not represented as a human being but as a golden lotus-bud decoration placed in the otherwise empty pavilion above the Earth goddess. In a nineteenth-century Japanese woodblock the Buddha Śākyamuni is depicted with his feet resting on lotuses, and he appears to float in a starry atmosphere. In another illustration, the child Buddha stands naked on a large lotus-shaped basin as two mythical dragons bathe the divine child from above.

Thus, whether supporting the book symbolising wisdom or knowledge, as in representations of the Buddhist deities of wisdom such as Manjūśrī or Prajnaparamita, or in itself signifying enlightenment, "the lotus symbol", in the words of Heinrich Zimmer, "which originally gave birth to beings and existences in unending succession, now carries the powerful wisdom of Nirvāṇa: the Word that puts an end to all individual existence, whether in heaven or on earth."[11]

From the earliest times the lotus has remained a unique metaphor for the heart of the devotee: *hṛd-puṣkara; hṛd-padma,* the primary abode of the deity. The 'lotus heart' is further likened to space, *ākāśa;* its eight petals representing four directions and four intermediate points of the compass. The eight-petalled lotus is basic to the drawings called *maṇḍalas,* which later came to play an important role in all three spiritual traditions. One of the earliest uses of the lotus with this symbolic meaning is represented in the ceilings of the Gupta-period Buddhist cave temples at Ajanta.

In Tāntric and Kuṇḍalīni Yoga, the representation of the human body as a microcosm and its special geography is of supreme importance. The main axis of the human spinal cord is considered the pivot of the universe; it is the *merū-daṇḍa,* in analogy with Mount Meru. Along this axis are a series of *cakras* in the shape of lotuses, with different number of petals.

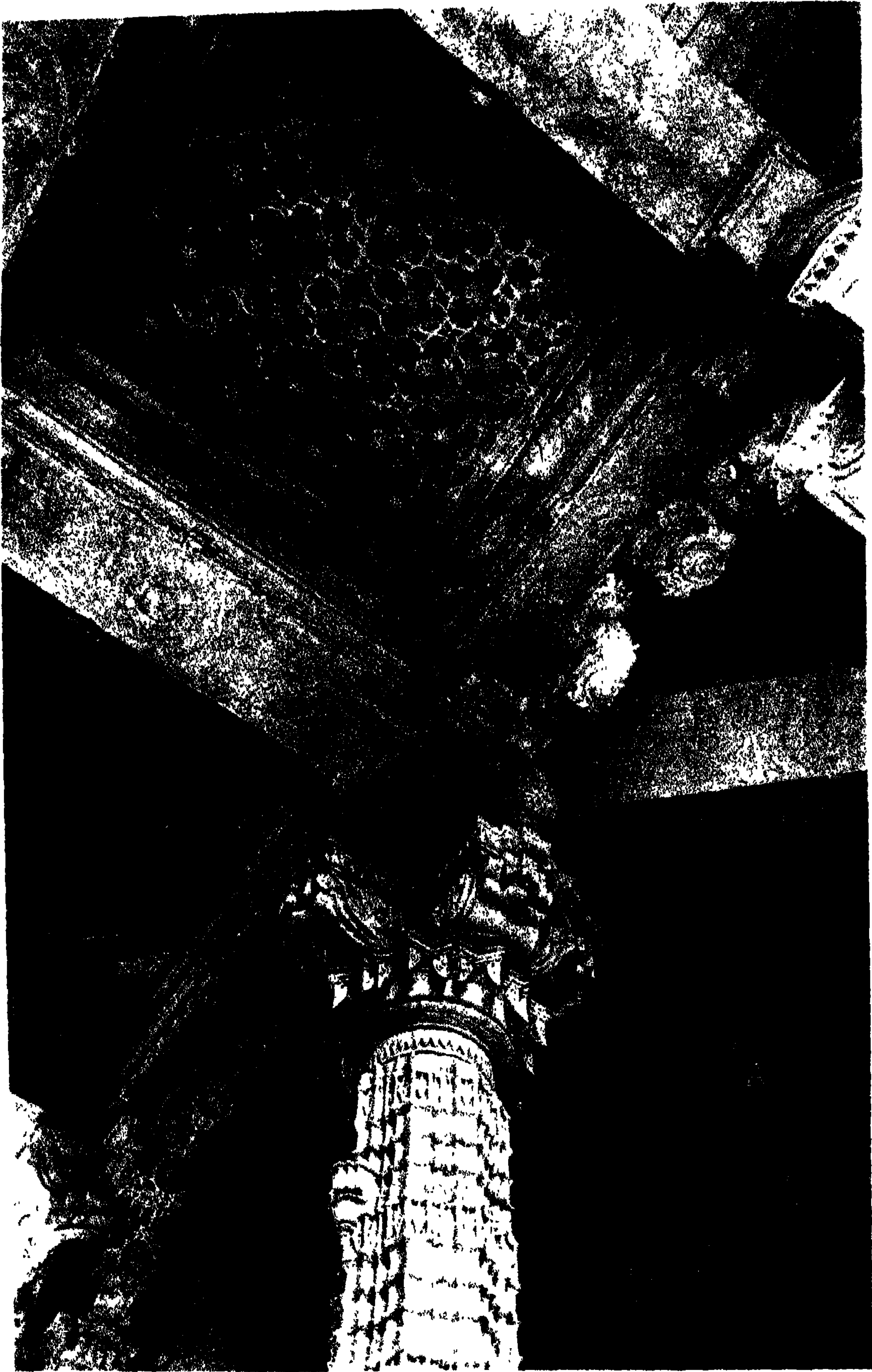
Significantly, Tāntric spiritual praxis requires the practitioner to pass through several stages or processes of cosmogenesis, the final plane located at the summit of the skull being known as 'lotus head', *usniśa kamala,* to the Buddhists and 'the thousand-petalled lotus' — *sahaśrara padma* or *cakra* to the Hindus and the Jains. A very early representation of this idea occurs on a mid sixth-century Nṛsiṁha, an *avatār* of Viṣṇu, where a lotus grows out of the god's head.

The lotus rhizomes and *yakṣas,* or lotus as a floral design are to be seen on pillars, railing medallions and other places on the Buddhist monuments at Bharhut, Sanchi, Amaravati, Bodhgaya, and in the early rock-cut temples of Western India.

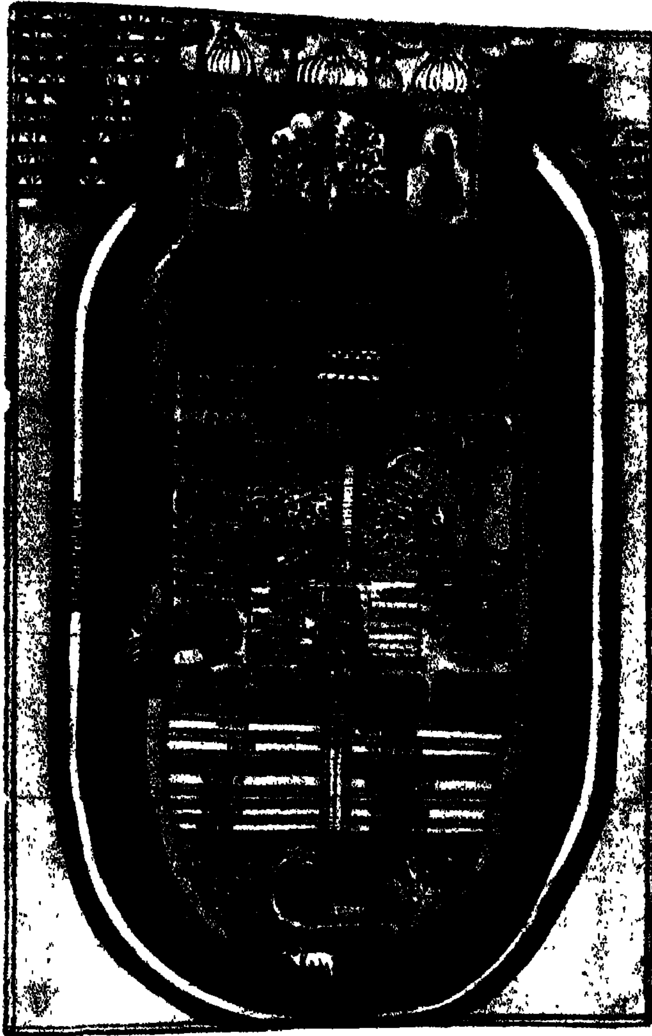


Dome of the *raṅgamaṇḍapa* in the Lunavasāhi temple, with another domical ceiling. The second ceiling has two panels of dancers and a beautifully carved flower in the centre, with four *kinnara* couples in the corners.

In the Jain temples at Dilwara and Ranakpur, lotuses have been carved on the ceilings in the *navacaukīs* and in the marble domes of the *raṅgamaṇḍapa,* or on the ceilings in the porches and the corridors in myriad ways, and with mesmerising magnificence and subtlety. Hundreds of *yakṣas* and *yakṣīs, vidyādevīs* and *vidyādharas, apsarās* and *jinas,* dancers and musicians adore the ceilings, domes and columns of these temples — meditating, dancing, celebrating, in the midst of lotus flowers, on lotus petals, re-



Ceilings in the Lunavasāhi temple, with the central dome in view



The Cosmic Egg, according to Hindu mythology, with Viṣṇu lying on *Śeṣa nāga* with a lotus emerging from his navel and Brahma sitting on it. Also shown are Lakṣmī, Garuḍa, etc.

Gouache on paper, 18th century, Rajasthan.

Courtesy: Ravi Kumar, *The Jain Cosmology*.

flecting, it seems, on the nature of the lotus itself!

On one remarkable ceiling in the corridor in the eleventh-century temple Vimalavasāhi, the sixteen-armed Nṛsiṁha tears the belly of the demon Hiraṇyakaśyapa with all the fury that is associated with the act. In a Jain temple, such depiction of violence is rare. Yet what renders this act a certain elegance and cosmic inevitability is the sixteen-petalled lotus flower in the centre of which both the demon and the god are engraved, more in an embrace than in a combat. Surrounding the lotus, on a rectangular panel, is the ancient myth of *sāgar maṁthan*, 'The Churning of the Ocean', in which the demons and gods struggle to obtain *amṛta*, 'the elixir of immortality'.

One can't say with certainty that one comprehends the meaning of these images and metaphors fully. One thing is certain, however: those wondrous hands that created these eternal images and exquisite lotuses, some as large as twenty-five feet in diameter, several hundreds years ago, as early as the eleventh century, must have known and experienced at some level the glory that resides in the treasure chest, *hiraṇya kośa*, of a 'thousand-petalled lotus'.

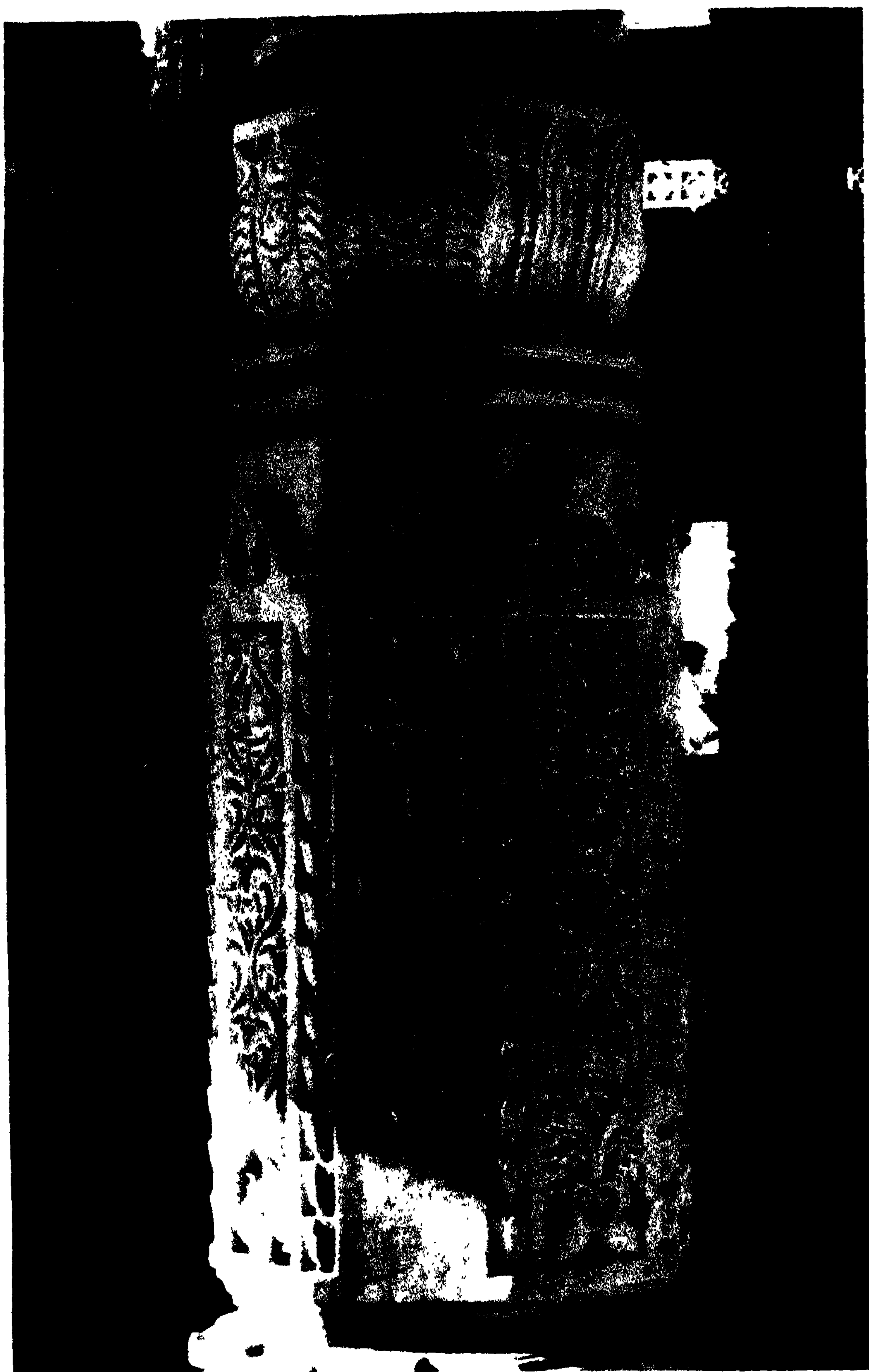


Ceiling in the southwest bay in the *navacauī* in the Lunavasāhi temple It is a domical ceiling of the *sabhāpadmamandāraka* variety. On the two slabs defining the ceiling are carved rows of lotus flowers with stalks and a band of lotus petals The ceiling is composed of six courses and a circular *padmaśilā* Each one of the four corners is occupied by a fine image of Gaja-Lakṣmī seated in *padmāsana* on a throne supported by elephants The eight-armed goddess is flanked on each side by an elephant carrying water pot in its trunk Two men are sitting on the elephant; they are also carrying water pots

A work of originality and elegance, the ceiling is the only one of its kind in the Dilwara temples.

Notes

1. Quoted by Coomaraswamy, A. *Elements of Buddhist Iconography,* p. 71.
2. Ibid.
3. Maury, C. *Folk Origins of Indian Art,* p. 43.
4. Quoted by Basham, A.L. *The Wonder that was India,* p. 189.
5. Quoted by Coomaraswamy from *Samyutta Nikaya,* op. cit., p. 21.
6. Ibid., p. 110.
7. Ibid., p. 71.
8. Pal, P. *Indian Sculpture,* p. 40.
9. Coomaraswamy, A., op. cit., p. 71, n. 38.
10. Op. cit., pp. 39-41.
11. Zimmer, H. *Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization,* p. 100.



Ratan Shah, brother of the minister, paying homage to deity in the Ādiśvara temple, Ranakpur.

Chapter III

Envisioning Hands

In the Image of Viśvakarmā

The best of artists hath no thought to show
Which the rough stone in its superfluous shell
Doth not include: to break the marble spell
Is all the hand that serves the brain can do.[1]
—Michelangelo

The Kailāśa temple at Ellora is the glory and wonder of Indian architecture. Fifty million tonnes of rock were won with chisel and wedge to create a trench out of which loomed the once blazing white temple. Who was the master architect of this colossal rock-cut eighth-century temple, as large as the Parthenon and one and a half times its height, is unknown, but his reaction to his own creation is recorded in an inscription: "Oh how did I make it?"

That such a massive achievement as the Kailāśa temple could ever be undertaken again is inconceivable; it was so even to the legendary architect, who is believed to have said that "it was only by *magic* that I could have constructed even this one."

A visitor to such a magical place as the Kailāśa temple, or the temples at Dilwara and Ranakpur, is moved to ask a similar question: "How did *they* do it?" It is always *they* not *he*, for one is so aware that a work of this stature could not be undertaken by one person alone, nor even by a few. It required many artists, craftsmen and workers with varied skills. The chief architect, *sthāpatī*, gave shape to a building that had been conceived by the *ācārya* or the *sthāpaka*, the architect-priest. He, in turn, was assisted by many others: *vardhaki*, the modellers and painters, *takṣaka*, the sculptors, *sūtragrahi*, the surveyors. Plus many thousand others who contributed to every grand enterprise in temple building in myriad ways.

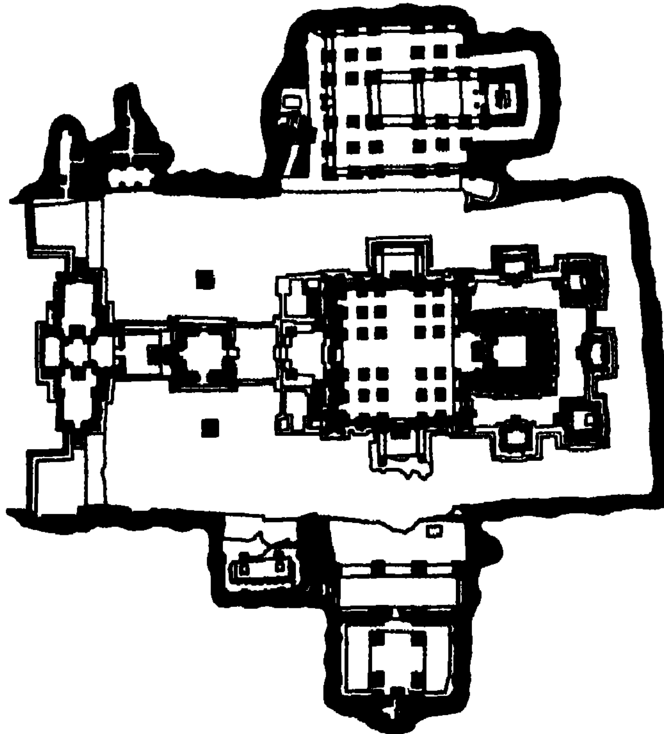
The name for any art or craft in India is *śilpa*, 'variegated artistic work', comprising art, skill, craft, labour, ingenuity, rite and ritual, form, and creation. Artists, artisans, craftsmen are all *śilpins*, engaged in creating, in the words of Aitareya Brāhmaṇa, "imitation of divine forms; by employing their rhythms, a metrical reconstitution is effected of the limited human personality."[2]

According to the Indian tradition, the range of crafts extends over the entire culture and comprises the work of the sculptor and the potter, the perfumer and the wheelwright, the weaver and the architect. The number of arts is unlimited but they are summed up by sixty-four *kalās*, the arts, each one of which is represented by a goddess, a *kalādevī*. In addition to the sixty-four *kalādevīs*, there are thirty-two goddesses of science, *vidyādevīs*. These two categories, the arts and the sciences, comprise the sum total of human knowledge and skill.

The *kalās* include the visual arts, music, dance, drama, as well as dressmaking and acrobatics. The perfections of delight which are experienced by the other sense count among their highly specialised branches — the culinary art or that of the perfumer, and the more comprehensive art of making love. There are many degrees of competence in all these arts, and a genius is known when met.

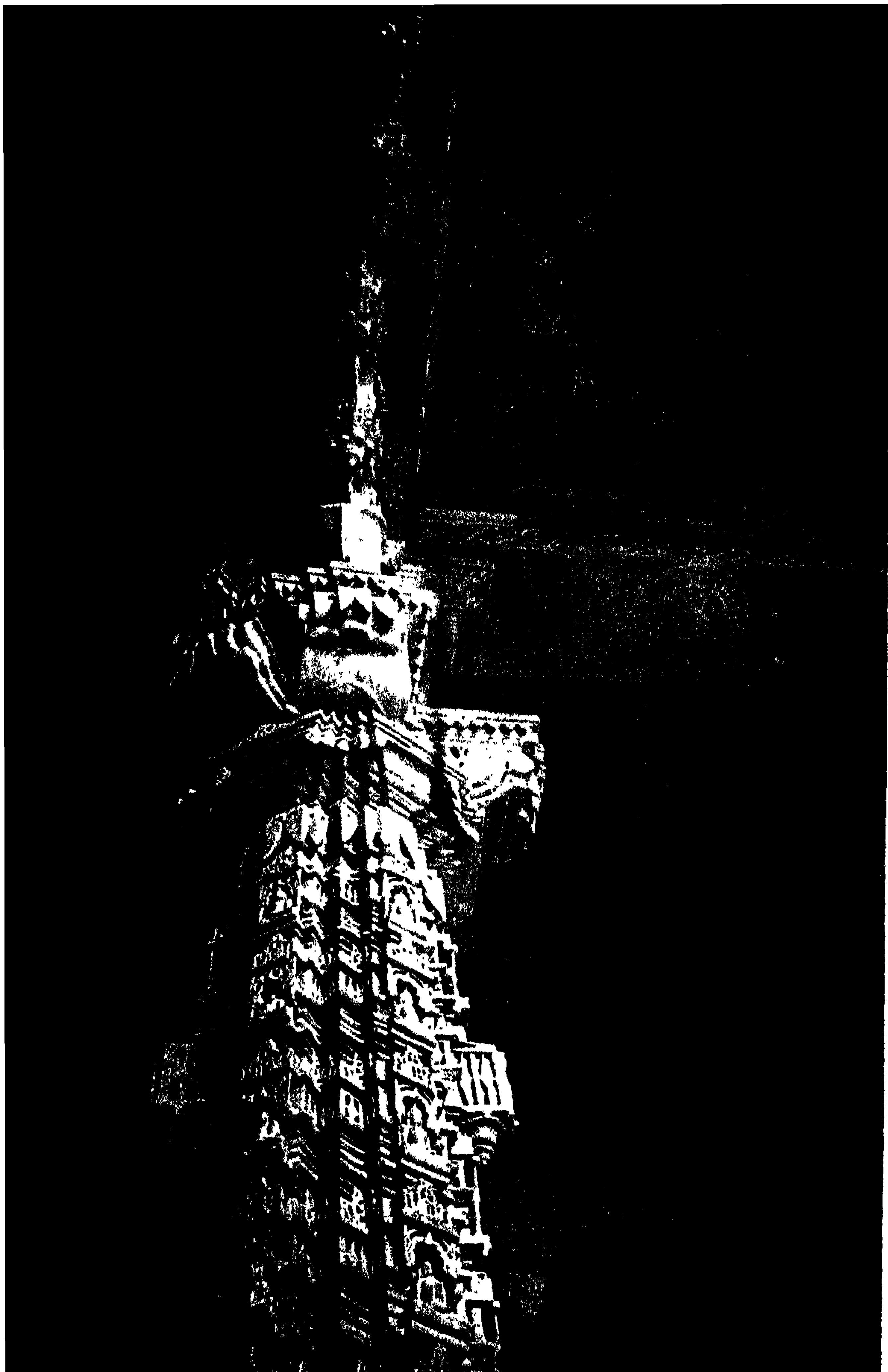


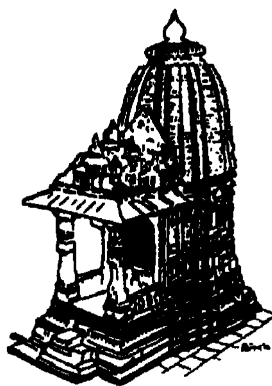
Kailāśa Temple at Ellora: Plan of upper storey [After B. Rowland and Sivaramamurti].



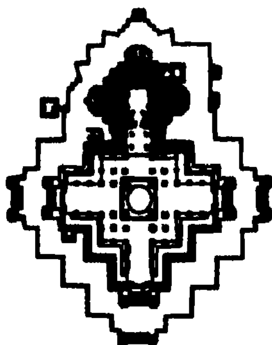
On page 53

Carved column, with figures of *jina* on it, and with a flower ceiling in the southern portico in the Lunavasāhi temple. Carved in high relief, the *mandāraka* element is best represented in this ceiling.

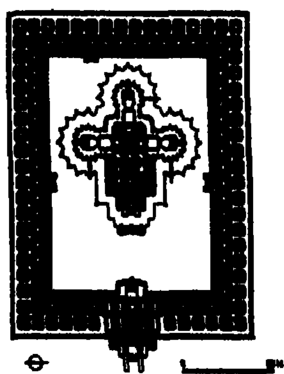




A deva-kulikā, Mahāvīra Temple complex, Osia [After Joshi].



Plan of Keśava Temple, Belur [After Sivaramamurti].



Plan of Keśava Temple, Somnathpur [After Sivaramamurti].

Every creature, according to the traditional Indian belief, has a function, *vrata,* that he fulfils in the universe. What function does the artist or craftsman fulfil in the society, and in that other invisible part of the universe, which he is able to convey by his work to those around him and to posterity?

The practitioner of one of the sixty-four *kalās,* which provided channels for every kind of creative endowment to be trained and employed, fulfilled his calling in the best way possible to him, and thus carried out his universal task. Vocation and assignment were reciprocal; together they constituted the particular duty, *svadharma,* whose lifelong discharge satisfied the maker, the patron and the standards by which art exists and evokes ever renewed response.

In our times, we consider an artist to be a rugged individualist, uncaring of social or cultural traditions, and concerned only with 'self expression'. But this has not been always so, neither in the East nor in the West. There is an old story of how the great cathedral of Chartres was struck by lightning and burnt to the ground. "Then thousands of people came from all points of the compass", writes Ingmar Bergman, the great Swedish film-maker, "like a giant procession of ants, and together they began to rebuild the cathedral on its old site. They worked until the building was completed — master builders, artists, labourers, clowns, noblemen, priests, burghers. But they all remained anonymous, and no one knows to this day who built the cathedral of Chartres."[3]

The artists and craftsmen, and others, who created the Indian temples, too did not conceive their art as their own, nor as the accumulated skill of ages, but as originating in the divine skill of Viśvakarmā — 'the Creator of the Universe' — and revealed by him. This is how the sacred texts trace back the traditions of the craftsman to the fountainhead, the sum total of consciousness, knowledge and inspiration. As Kramrisch puts it: "In India, more than anywhere, form results from performance. The making of the work of art is a ritual. Its magic is active in the form. By performing the rites of art, the craftsman transforms himself and his substance. Form, performance and transformation are simultaneous, inseparable aspects of Indian art. They inhere in its creation and produce their effect in its concrete shape."[4]

A grand work, such as a temple, calls upon all *kalās* to make concrete the vision of the Master Artist. Buddhist monuments, for instance, were collective monuments, and the work of many artists, guilds and donors. They were built by contributions from distant parts of the country and from all levels of the society — monks, nuns, courtesans, merchants, nobles, artists and artisans. It is thus that on the south gate of the Great Stūpa at Sāñchī of

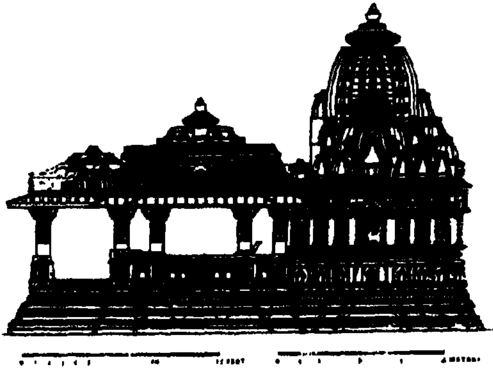
the first century, the ivory carvers of Vidisa recorded on one of the stone panels that it was their work. Again, on the same gate, the top beam is inscribed so that we know it is 'the gift of Ananda, son of Vasisthi, the foreman of the artisans of King Satakarni'.

As creator of temples and religious monuments, whether his name is remembered or forgotten, the artist is beyond earthly reward. As a member of a traditional society, as an artist or an artisan, he fulfilled a social demand. By contributing his work, he discharged his duty, his *dharma,* and earned his living. But the work of art in India, over and above its completeness as creative act and form, has its purpose and function the acquisition of merit on a spiritual plane. This merit, however, belongs to the patron or donor, and not to the artist. The work of art, as a vehicle to heavenly bliss, belongs to the patron. An artist thus performs his work for his patron and gains his artistic stature by giving form to a vision. He is a creator-magician and a mediator; by his creations he secures for his patron a place in heaven while on earth.[5]

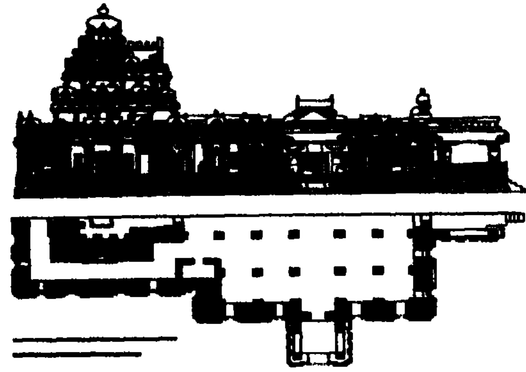
Traditionally, architecture in India is considered the most comprehensive visual art. As applied astrology, it is part of the fifth appendix, *Vedanga,* to the Veda; as a ritual, it is part of Kalpa, the sixth appendix to the Veda. As an applied knowledge, it belongs to Tantra, an *Upveda,* and therewith, to the Atharva Veda.

Thus, in addition to his technical competence, the designing architect of temples was expected to have knowledge of architectural scripture and the principles of other traditional sciences. He was expected to know mathematics and the Purāṇas, the art of painting, and the geography of various countries. He was also to know the essence of the Vedas and Agamas, and was to be an initiate, ardent in his work and well-versed in *Śilpa Śāstra.* In character, he was to be of happy disposition and well-disciplined, righteous, kind, free from jealousy, and well-born. He was to have firm friends, and his guru was to be a Brahman of high birth.

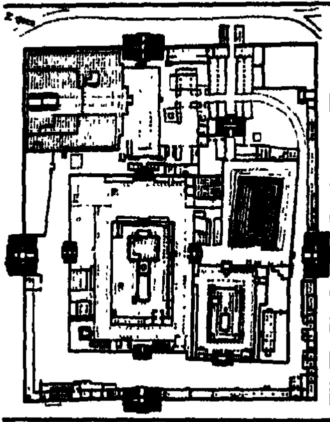
The collaboration of the chief architect and the Brahman guru began with the ploughing of the ground on which the temple was to be built. The plough was consecrated by the touch of the guru, the chief architect ploughed the first rounds. The distinction was made between the craftsmen and the labourers, though unskilled manual labour itself, when it was for a sacred purpose, was considered *kar sevā* — 'a spiritual dedication by hands', and it was performed by members of all castes from the highest downward. Citizens and villagers, of all social status, collected earth from riverbanks and the fields, or they conveyed stone beams, for the construction of the temple.



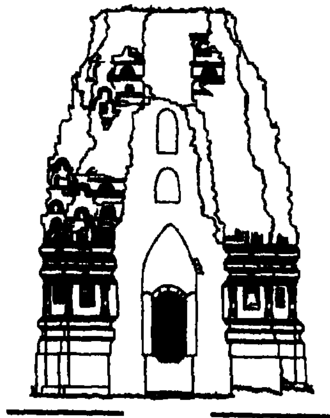
Nilakantha Temple, Sunak: Elevation [After B. Rowland].



Virupaksha Temple, Pattadakal: Half-plan and section [After B. Rowland].



Ground plan of the Minakshi Temple at Madurai [After B. Rowland].



Gupta period brick temple at Bhitargaon [After B. Rowland].

The establishment of a temple in India has always meant the acquisition of merit on a spiritual plane, not for the architect-priest but for the patron or the donor. For merit's sake, for acquiring *puniya*, the patron commissioned the construction of the temple to secure a lasting place in heaven for himself and for his close relatives. The magical potency of a temple, in fact, of any religious work of art, thus serves as a vehicle to heaven, not for the artist, but for the patron.

The traditional role of the Indian artist-architect thus has been not only to create a work of aesthetic delight by which 'a world beyond the senses becomes visible, tangible, and concrete, so that it can be enjoyed and understood', but also to make it a vehicle for magically transporting its patron to heaven while on earth. An artist's work thus both paves the way to heaven for the patron, and brings a piece of heaven to earth, for others to see the earth afresh, with new eyes.

The artist thus is a creator-magician and a mediator, akin to a god, bestower of special powers to his patron. He stands on a lotus, as the two architects Loyana and Kela of the Vimalavasāhi temple at Dilwara do, next to the goddess Sarasvatī.

The consummate skill and an unswerving intuition of the artist give concrete form to an exalted vision, making him a great master. His work is a 'masterpiece', creating in the hearts of the devotees in the temple a sense of awe and wonder. Such a masterpiece is the 15th century Ādīśvara temple at Ranakpur, where in its breathtaking halls, on the facets of a pillar the architect and patrons carved their likeness.

The prestige of the chief architect of the temples was high; princes of different states came to consult him. They put on splendid garments for their visit and brought presents in their own hands.

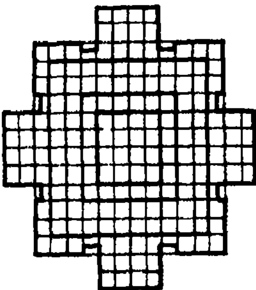
Over the centuries the families of master architects are known to us from their work. We also know of patrons and gurus, successive heads of a monastic order, the Saiddhāntikās of Mattamayura, who, from the ninth to eleventh centuries, built monasteries and temples still in existence all over central India, from the west coast to Magadha, and laid down their teaching

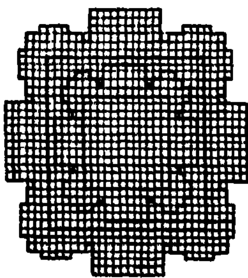


A domical ceiling in the *navacaukī* in the Vimalavasāhi temple, with nine lotuses and pendants.

in a detailed textbook of the craft, the *Iśanaśivagurudevapaddhatī.* In this book the sustaining power of tradition and its meaning are expressed by the rites performed when the *sthāpaka,* the guru, installs the temple. He places in it the seed, *bīja,* of the temple. While the temple is built, the seed, 'the causal creative image of the temple', dwells in the 'heart-lotus' of the guru. On completion of the building, the seed is ritually brought from the heart of the guru and placed in the temple. This seed is consciousness, *cit.* It is then that the *sthāpatī,* the architect, gives the entire merit to the patron, for says the text, 'Brahmā himself is the Architect'.

In the long history of India, with works of great art created throughout the centuries, a deep and abiding concern for the quality of one's work is most evident. Apprenticeship with a master or with a recognized member of the craftsmen's guilds was a safeguard against low standards, incompetence, or fraud or self-deception. That it didn't do away with these faults altogether is evident from the threatening words of the *Samarangana-sūtradhāra,* a most exhaustive compendium on the visual arts which was compiled in the earlier part or the middle of the eleventh century by King Bhoja. From the warning, one discovers that nothing less than death awaits one who practises architecture without correct knowledge or is mistakenly proud of false knowledge. Architecture was not only a utilitarian art, but it evoked cosmic principles; an architect went to his task in the likeness of the architect of the universe, Viśvakarmā. Were the architect thus to infringe upon any rule or deviate from correct proportions, such neglect or dissonance was felt to be fatal to the structure, not only of a particular building, but also to the order of the state, indeed of the universe. For this reason, "the ghost of such a man, dead before his time, will wander on this wide earth." Having infringed the order of the universe, he is doomed to belong nowhere; "he who should have been a builder of homes is to remain homeless in a disembodied condition."[6]





The Hindu Vastupurushamandala transformed into architectural plans.

In addition to the moral and metaphysical concerns about the quality of the artist, King Bhoja, as author and compiler of the great compendium, the *Samaranganasūtradhāra,* takes a third source of failure into account. This is the case of the expert in his craft, the virtuoso who lacks intellectual insight. Of him the king says that 'like a blind man he will be misled by anyone', for he is his own dupe, a potential casualty in the field of art.

The earlier encyclopedia of all the arts, the *Viṣṇudharmottara,* written about the sixth century, comprises a dialogue between a king and a sage. Here the king inquires and the sage instructs in the knowledge of the arts. Such knowledge is not only the domain of one or the other of the sages and seers, but in the sum

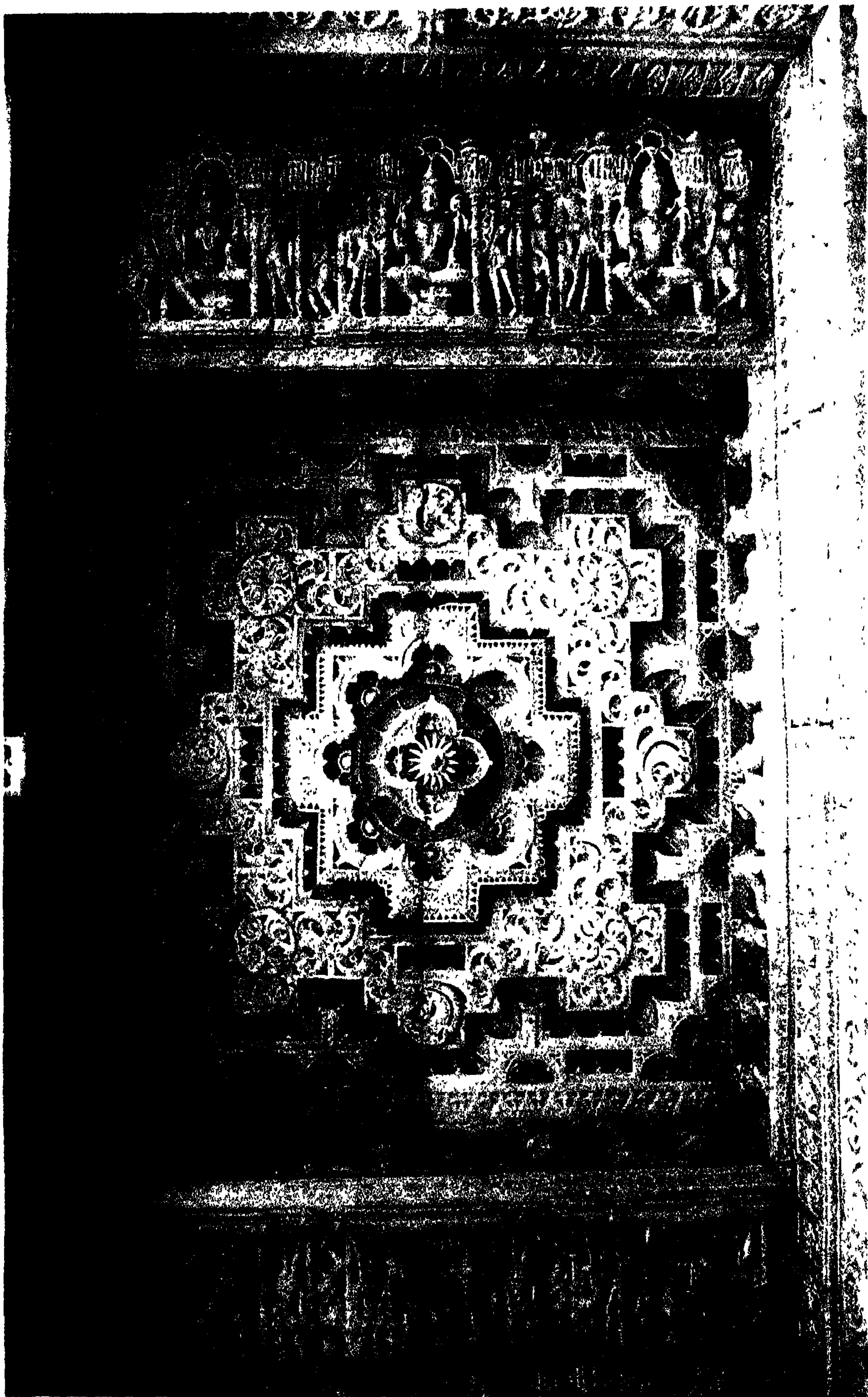
total of Indian knowledge it forms part of Revelation, the Veda, to which it belongs as applied knowledge.[7]

In the creation of a temple, with so many people working together with their hands, skills and imagination, in traditional Indian society, the public had special obligation towards an artist and a craftsman. It is laid down in Manu's code that 'the hand of a craftsman engaged in his work is always ritually pure.' The *Arthaśāstra* decrees capital punishment for any person who causes a craftsman the loss of a hand or an eye.[8]

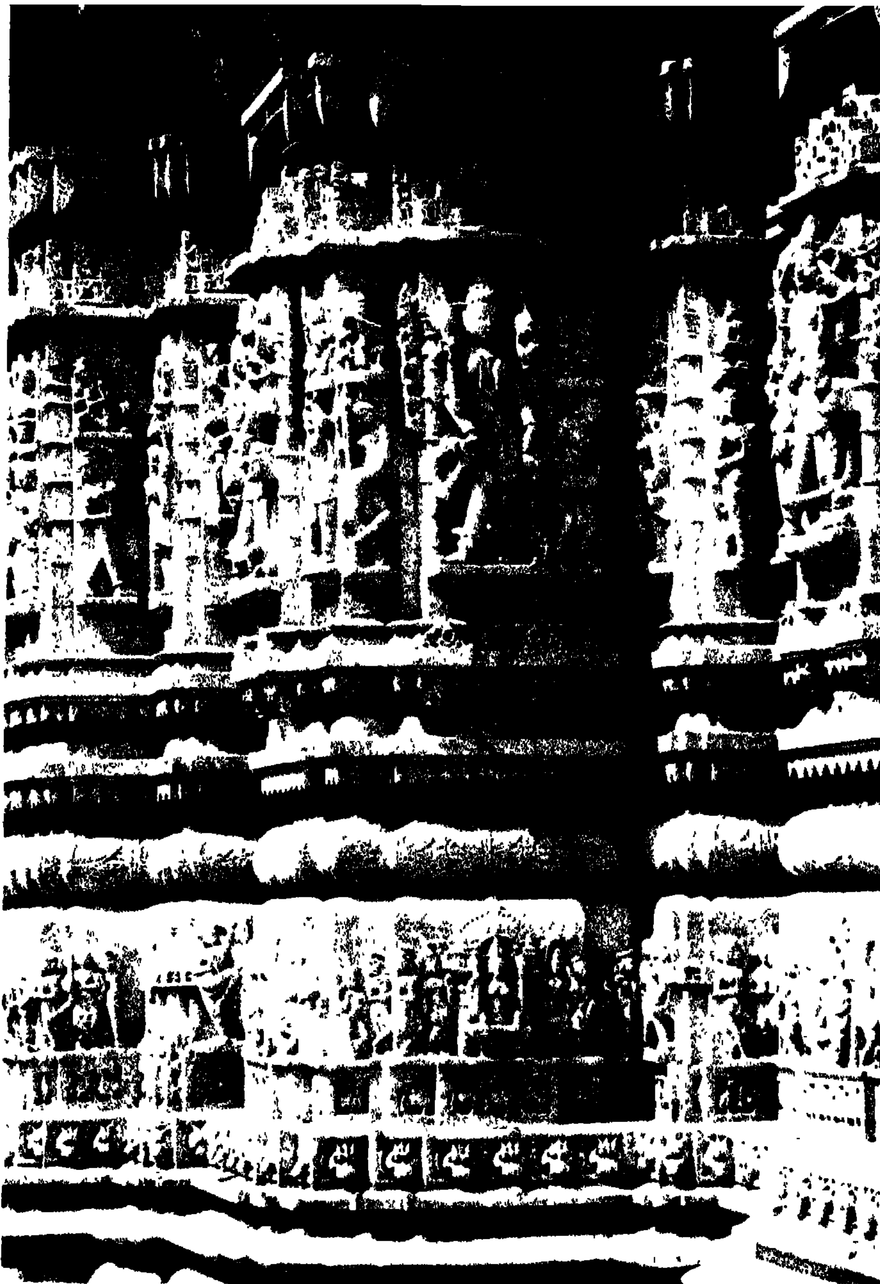
For the *kalās* to flourish, there is a continual need for the connoisseur, the *rasik*, of the arts, for delight is not mere pleasure; It is not self-indulgence; it requires discipline. The keener the perception the greater the delight. In various carvings in the Jain temples, like other temples in India, there is a profuse cele-bration of the performing artists: dancers, musicians, lovers Whatever other ambience the temples may have, there is always an aura of celebration of life, with all its mythopoeic reference. The devotee is thus expected to be a *rasik* of the spiritual and the aesthetic life alike, for in the *raṅgamaṇḍapa*, 'the hall of celebrations', all these *kalās* came together to invoke the greatest *kalākār* — the artist-architect of the universe himself.



Possibly chief architect Deepa paying homage to deity in the Ādīśvara temple, Ranakpur.



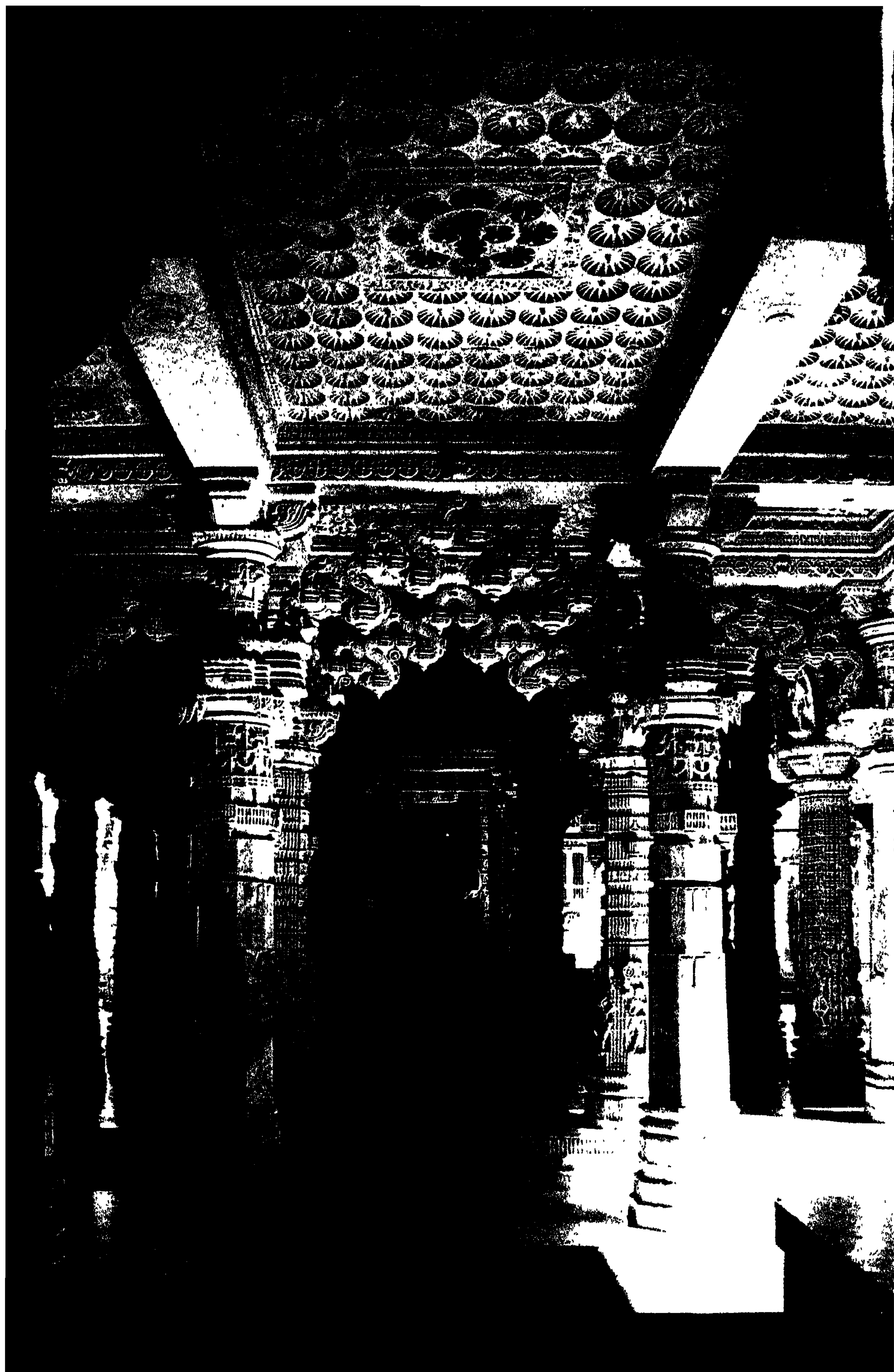
A corridor ceiling in the Vimalavasāhi temple with goddesses seated in *lalitāsana*. The square flat surface shows, one within the other, two stepped diamonds, each filled with *gajatālu*. The line of the outer diamond at the four corners presents the shape of a Greek Cross. The central space of the ceiling is divided into two concentric circles. On two sides of the square is a narrow band carved with foliage and lotus buds.



Dancers and musicians, the Pārśvanātha temple, Ranakpur.

Notes

1. Quoted by Bronowski, J. *Ascent of Man*, London, p. 113.
2. As quoted by Kramrisch, S. in *Exploring India's Sacred Art*, p. 62.
3. Four Screenplays of Ingmar Bergman, pp. 21-22.
4. Op. cit., p. 58.
5. For a comprehensive discussion, see Kramrisch, S., op. cit., pp. 51-58.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.

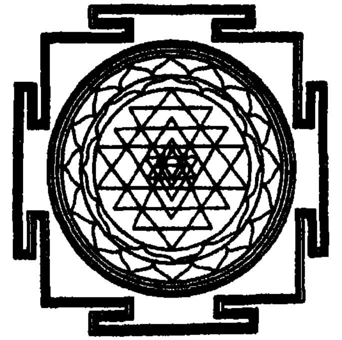


Chapter IV

Lotus in the Stone

Jain Temples at Dilwara

[Temple] is the concrete symbol of Reintegration and coheres with the rhythm of the thought imagined in its carvings and laid out in its proportions. Their perfection is a celebration of all the rites enacted during the building of the temple from the ground to the pinnacle. Nothing that is seen on the temple is left unsaid in the verbal tradition nor is any of the detail arbitrary or superfluous. Each has a definite place and is part of the whole.
...temple is the sum total of architectural rites performed on the basis of its myths. The myth covers the ground and is the plan on which the structure is raised.[1]
—Stella Kramrisch



Shri Yantra, Tantric Mandala.

Three spiritual and artistic traditions — Hindu, Buddhist and Jain — flourished in India concurrently for over two thousand years; each one of these traditions has unique and salient features, but they also have many vital areas of interaction. In their temples, for instance, the deities installed in the main shrine and the sculpture inspired by respective mythologies are different but in their architectural and structural forms, regional differences are far more significant than any differences necessitated by any particular religious belief and practice. The plan of the Pārśvanātha temple at Khajuraho, for instance, may be different from that of Hindu temples there, but those latter temples themselves differ from each other in many important ways. In fact, there is nothing to show that the differences in the plans are due to their forms of worship.

The stamp of Khajuraho is apparent on all the temples at that place. It has been observed that there is "no religion-wise difference in the sculptural embellishments of the religious edifices. The same *joie de vivre* is apparent in the sculpture of all religions except where it is strictly religious in character. Call them *yakṣīs, attendants, nāyikās, apsarās, sura-sundarīs or alasa-kanyās,* they appear everywhere, singly or in *mithuna,* and nothing in the austere tenets and practices of any religion could prevent their appearance in places of worship. From the very early times, as evidenced at Sanchi in the Buddhist stūpas or at Mathura in the remains and miniature representations of the Jaina *stūpas,*

On page 62
A wide view of the *khattaka,* with image of the *jina,* in the Lunavasāhi temple.

they are present ubiquitously. Nude *yakṣīs* attend on a sculptured *stūpa* at Mathura and are seen in lascivious poses on railing-posts. While it is true that Jaina iconography does not permit the cosmic sexualism of some Tantric, Brahmanical and Buddhist deities, erotic couples appear covertly in the medieval Jain temples at Khajuraho and elsewhere and very freely on the *śikhara* of the one at Arang in Chattisgarh....Untrammeled by the austere tenets of the creed at the service of which he was working, the artist followed the practices of an age which fully sanctioned, even relished, them. In the same way, while the texts forebode the Jaina monks to live in painted houses, the monks did put up with the delightful paintings in their cave-temples. Such was the urge of artistic embellishment."[2]

In addition, over the centuries, a vast range of cosmogonic and cosmological symbolisms, drawn from Hindu, Buddhist and Jain traditions, was continually integrated into the rich morphology of the Indian temples of all three traditions. Jain temples and sculpture, thus, should be viewed in the context of the overall Indian culture, and various cross-currents that have nourished them, and not apart from them. In fulfilment of their spiritual needs, the Jains followed similar lines of development through the ages as the followers of other Indian creeds did. They worked within the framework of their own religious beliefs and cosmological constructs, but nevertheless always remained an integral part of the greater Indian cultural ethos.

Vaṭṭhu-sara-payarana in Prakrit is the first major treatise on Jain architecture written in 1315 A.D. The first three chapters in this treatise are devoted to residential houses, iconography and temple architecture.

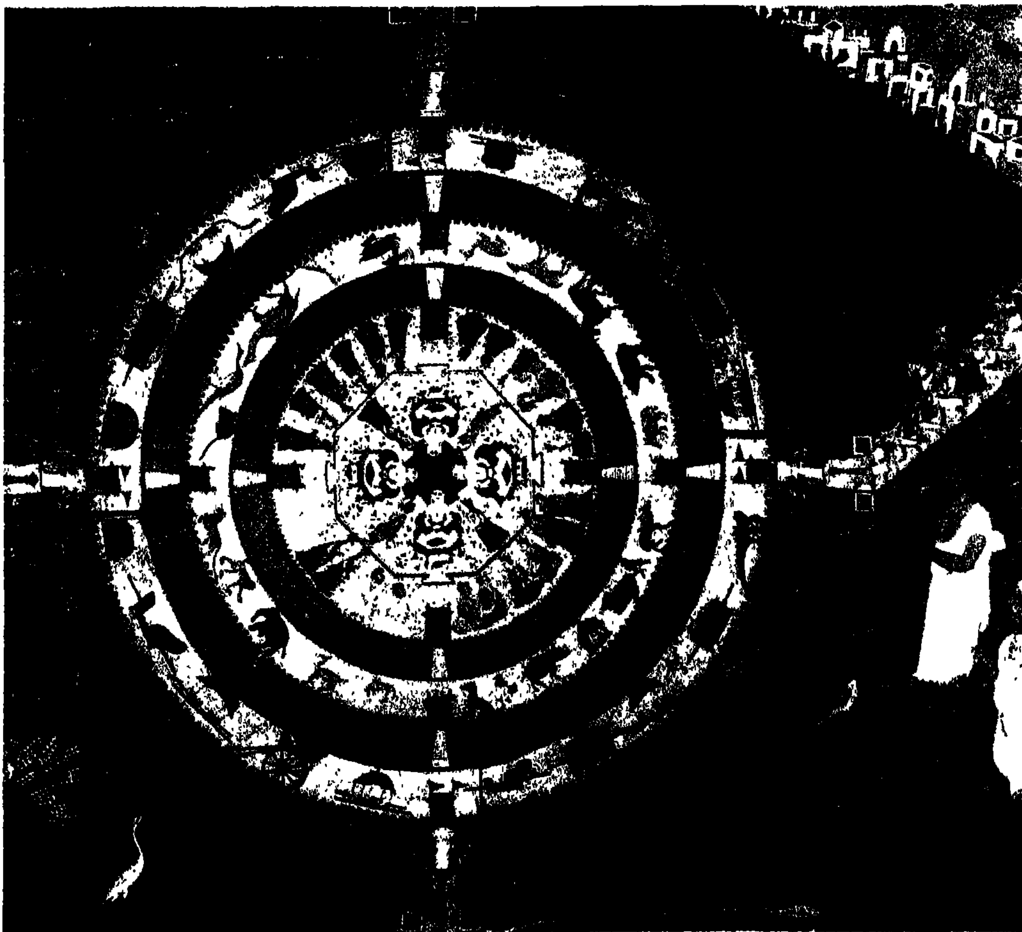
The Jain temple, it has been suggested, should be seen as the symbolic representation of "the *samavasaraṇa* or the fascinating auditorium of the *tīrthaṅkara* who, as one of those to be bowed before any one of the other *parameṣṭhins,* would deliver a sermon only inside the *samavasaraṇa,* whose idol was the first to appear and whose iconic symbol in the form of *mūlanāyaka* or the main deity must be installed in the temple....The Jaina temple then, with this very idea behind its origin, went on to having a parallel and simultaneous evolution....with the temples of co-traditions."[3]

As far back as the fourth century B.C. there is a long and extensive history of building of Jain monuments and sculptures in many parts of India — from Mathura to Udayagiri, from Marwar and Mungthala near Mount Abu in Rajasthan to Karnataka in the South. Even as the vagaries of nature and political conflicts, both internal and external, took their toll, many outstanding examples of Jain monuments and temples are still to be found in many parts of the country. In particular, the present states of Rajasthan and

Gujarat in Western India have several magnificent Jain temples created with consummate skill and imagination.[4]

The two temples, Vimalavasāhi and Lunavasāhi, at Dilwara in Mount Abu considered here, are amongst the most celebrated examples of Caulukya architecture that developed during the Caulukya dynasty that reigned from 950-1246 A.D. The history of Gujarat is greatly influenced by the Caulukya period which saw a great resurgence in temple building and the arts. Many of the temples built during this period have not survived, but those which have bear witness to a certain architectural and sculptural magnificence.

During this period, and in these regions, the general plan of the Jain temples was not much different from the Hindu shrines. Nevertheless, the iconographic treatment did differ to correspond to the mythological narrations, philosophical tenets and rituals of Jainism. The architects, masons and craftsmen all came from the same pool which worked on Hindu or Buddhist temples, and later on Muslim mosques, or other buildings in different regions of India.



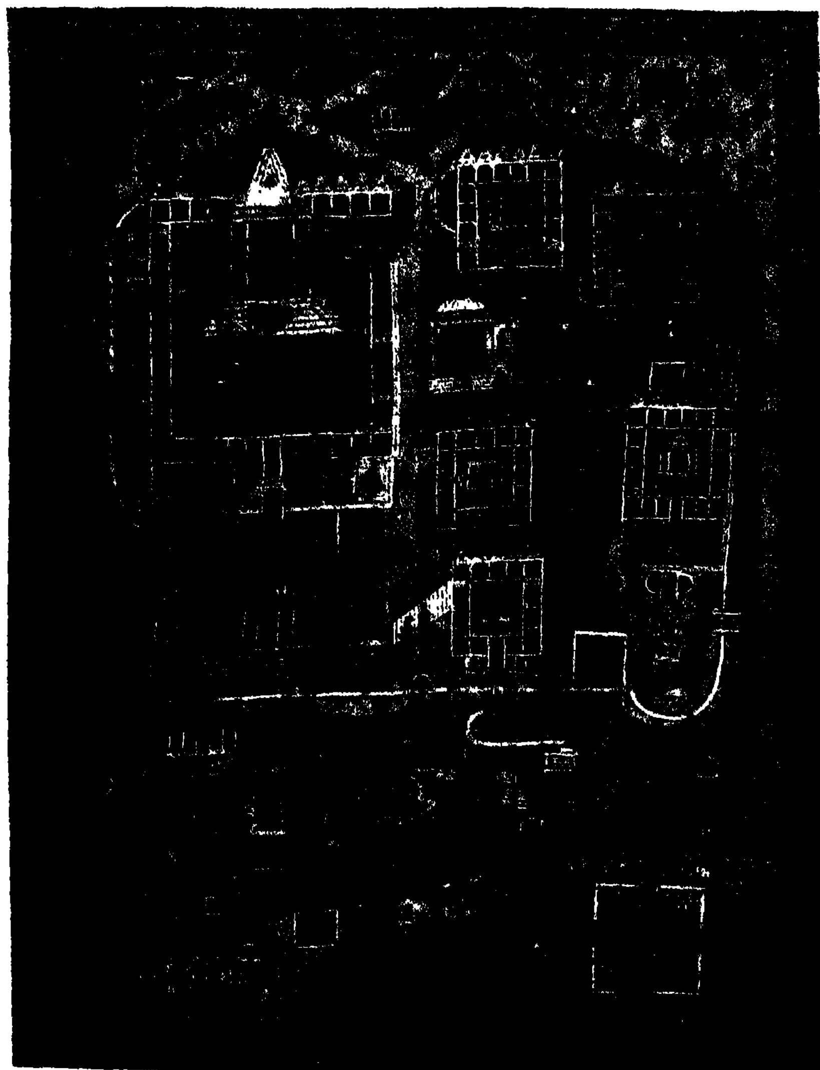
Samavasaraṇa, Celestial Hall for the Universal Sermon, Rajasthan, c. 1800. Opaque watercolour on paper.

A Caulukya temple has all the principal features of a north Indian temple. It comprises of *garbhagṛha* or *mūlaprāsāda*, 'the sanctum', a *gūḍhamaṇḍapa*, 'a closed hall', and a *mukhamaṇḍapa* or *trikamaṇḍapa*, 'an entrance porch to the sanctum'. In the larger temples, such as the Vimalavasāhi and the Lunavasāhi, along the same axis, often preceded by a *toraṇa*, 'an ornamental arch', there is a detached *sabhāmaṇḍapa* or *raṅgamaṇḍapa*, 'an assembly hall' or 'a dance pavilion'.

In elevation, the Caulukya temple has the usual components of *pīṭha*, 'the member between the ground and the podium', *vedibandha*, 'the podium', and *jaṅghā*, 'a wall between the podium and the eave cornice'. The mouldings and decorative elements occur in a sequence and according to the tradition.[5]

The *maṇḍapas* in a Caulukya temple are peristylar in design, and the pillars are profusely decorated with figures, floral design and ornaments, all according to a well-established tradition. The *maṇḍapas* show an octagonal arrangement of pillars and in the larger conceptions, *toraṇas* are thrown across the principal pillars.

The domical ceiling of the *raṅgamaṇḍapa* is supported on an octagonal frame of architraves resting over pillars. It consists of a series of diminishing concentric courses culminating in an elaborately designed *padmaśilā*, 'the central pendant of a lotus flower'.



Pilgrimage picture of Satrunjaya, Gujarat, c. 1800. Opaque watercolour on cotton. The pata provides a visionary view of temple complexes.



Jain temple complex at Dilwara.

The *mukhamaṇḍapa* and the *maṇḍapa* transepts are decorated with ornamental balustrades. The interior of a Caulukya temple thus is richly designed whereas the exterior is similar to the temples of the northern region.

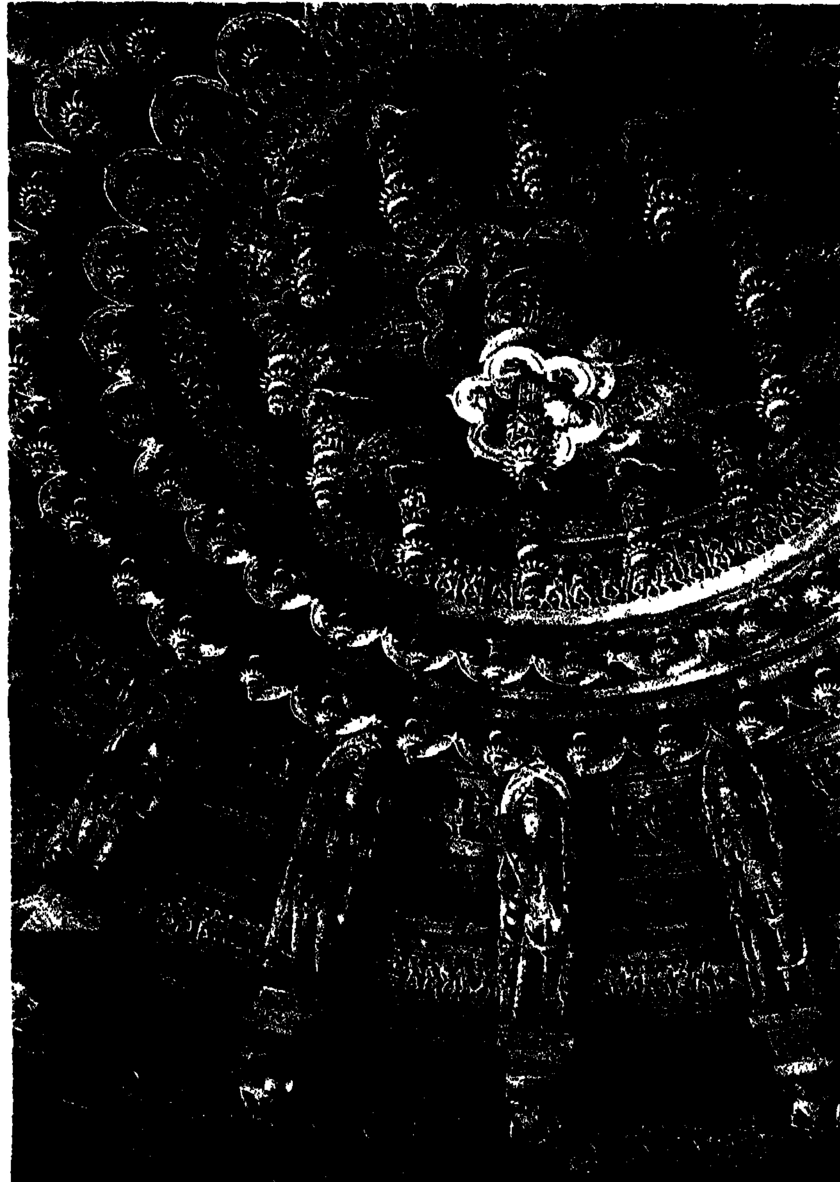
As the Caulukya style developed further, the sanctum, *gūḍhamaṇḍapa, mukhamaṇḍapa* and the *raṅgamaṇḍapa* were all arranged along one axis and placed in a quadrangle surrounded by an enclosure of *devakulikās,* 'shrine-cells' facing one or sometimes two bays of *bhāmati,* 'colonnaded corridors'. The elaboration of the pillared porch into six or nine *caukīs,* 'bays', and the addition of the enclosure of *devakulikās* around the courtyard, with colonnaded corridors, constitute the special contribution of the Jains to the Caulukya building style.

Here, for our reflections on the Jain temple architecture and iconography of the Caulukya period, we draw principally from two temples at Dilwara: the 11th century Vimalavasāhi and the 13th century Lunavasāhi. Yet there are many other outstanding Jain temples of this period, both in Rajasthan and Gujarat, that command attention and admiration. Of these mention must be made of the five temples at Kumbharia, the Nemināthа temple at Girnar, the Ajitanātha temple at Taranga and the Pārśvanātha temple at Ghumli.

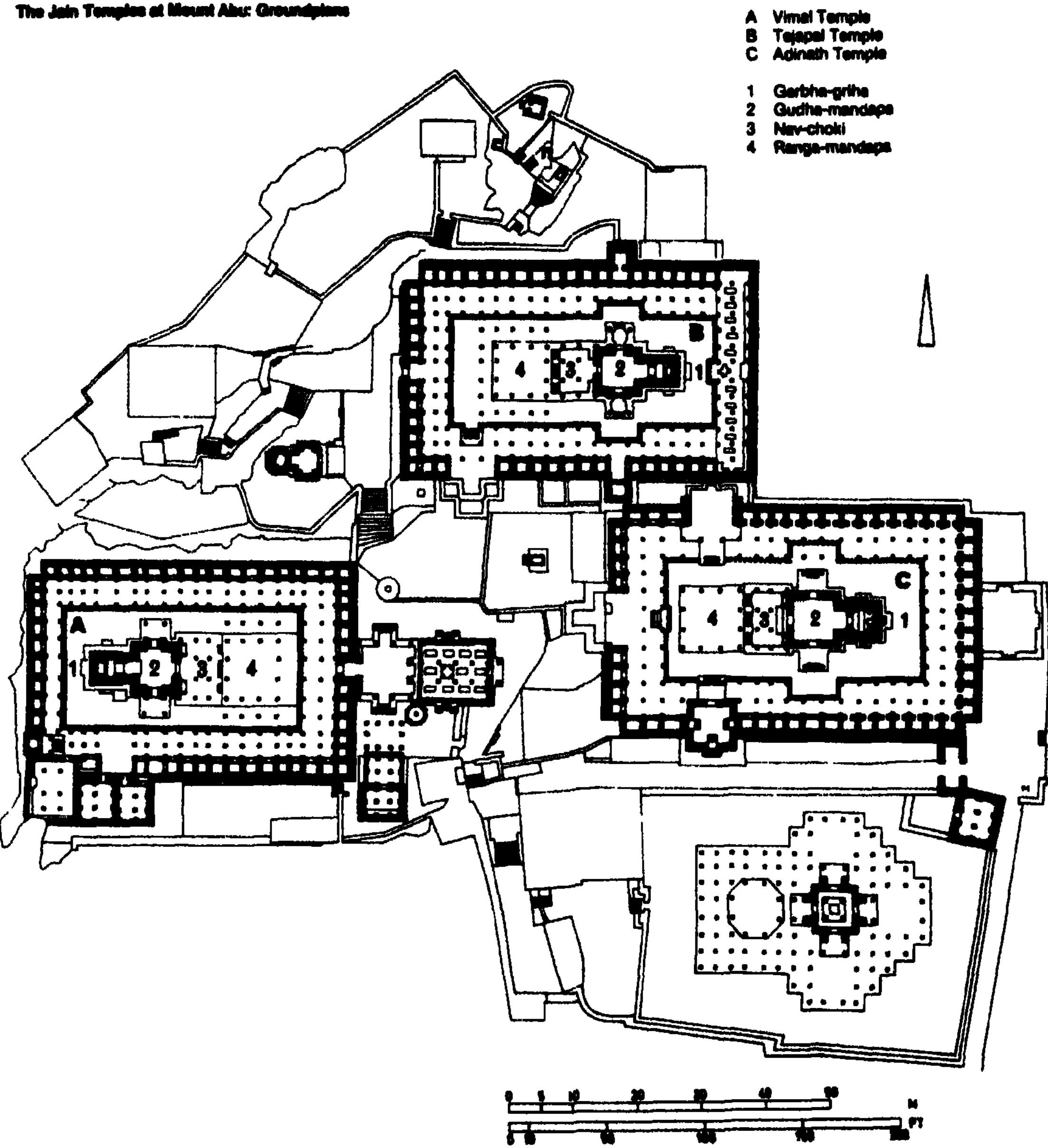
It may be noted that even though many of these temples were built, financed and inspired by the rulers, or their ministers and generals, there was, nevertheless, an active contribution to this mammoth undertaking by the general public. The *devakulikās* at Vimalavasāhi were built by the *vyavahārīs,* the businessmen. The Mahāvīra temple at Kumbharia is called the *Arasana saṃghacaitya,* 'the temple of Jain congregation at Arasana'. The Nemināṭha temple at Kumbharia was built by Pasila, and its *maṇḍapa* was added by Hansibai. In a similar manner, several *jina* images in the temples at Mount Abu, Kumbharia and elsewhere were installed, from time to time, by Jain *śrāvakas,* 'lay followers'.

The Vimalavasāhi

The Vimalavasāhi temple is one of the group of five Jain temples at Dilwara in Mount Abu in Western Rajasthan. Built in 1032 A.D. by Dandanayaka Vimala, the Vimalavasāhi temple is the celebrated marble temple dedicated to Ādinātha, the first *tīrthaṅkara.*



Dome in the *raṅgamaṇḍapa* of the Vimalavasāhi temple. Sixteen *vidyādevīs* and *vidyādharas* are shown in the dome. The dome is 25 ft in diameter and less than 30 ft in height from the floor to the apex. The dome is composed of eleven circular courses and a long circular *padmaśilā.*



The Jain Temples at Mount Abu: Groundplans
A Vimal Temple
B Tejapal Temple
C Adinath Temple
1 Garbha-griha
2 Gudha-mandapa
3 Nav-choki
4 Ranga-mandapa

It is among the early examples of Caulukya style temple architecture. Its *garbhagṛha* or *mūlaprāsāda, gūḍhamaṇḍapa* and *trikamaṇḍapa* or *mukhamaṇḍapa* (popularly known as *nava-caukī*) alone are original, dating back to the eleventh century; the other parts were added in the twelfth century. The *trikamaṇḍapa* in this temple is exquisitely ornate, and its columns resemble those at the Sun Temple at Modhera, as does one of the *kṣipta*-type ceilings. Its two *khattakas*, 'niches', are the earliest of its kind in Gujarat.

From the numerous inscriptions in the Jain temple complex at Dilwara, we gather detailed information about "the founding of these temples, various renovations carried out, additional structures put up and to the installation and consecration of images."[6] From the inscriptions one learns that Vimalavasāhi was built and dedicated to Ādinātha in A.D. 1031-32, that it was renovated in parts, once in 1149 A.D. and again in 1251 A.D., and for the third time in 1321 A.D. and that "a number of subshrines, niches and (single and groups or panels of) idols were installed in different parts of the temple through the centuries."[7]

The *raṅgamaṇḍapa* in the temple was added during the reign of Kumarapala by his minister Prithvipala in 1149 A.D. Some of the vestibule ceilings joining the *raṅgamaṇḍapa* are indeed architectural masterpieces. The central ceiling of the *raṅgamaṇḍapa* measures over seven metres in diameter; it is amongst the largest of its kind in any of the temples in Gujarat. Its central pendant, *padmaśilā*, is proportionately smaller, as are the ornate columns supporting the magnificent ceiling.

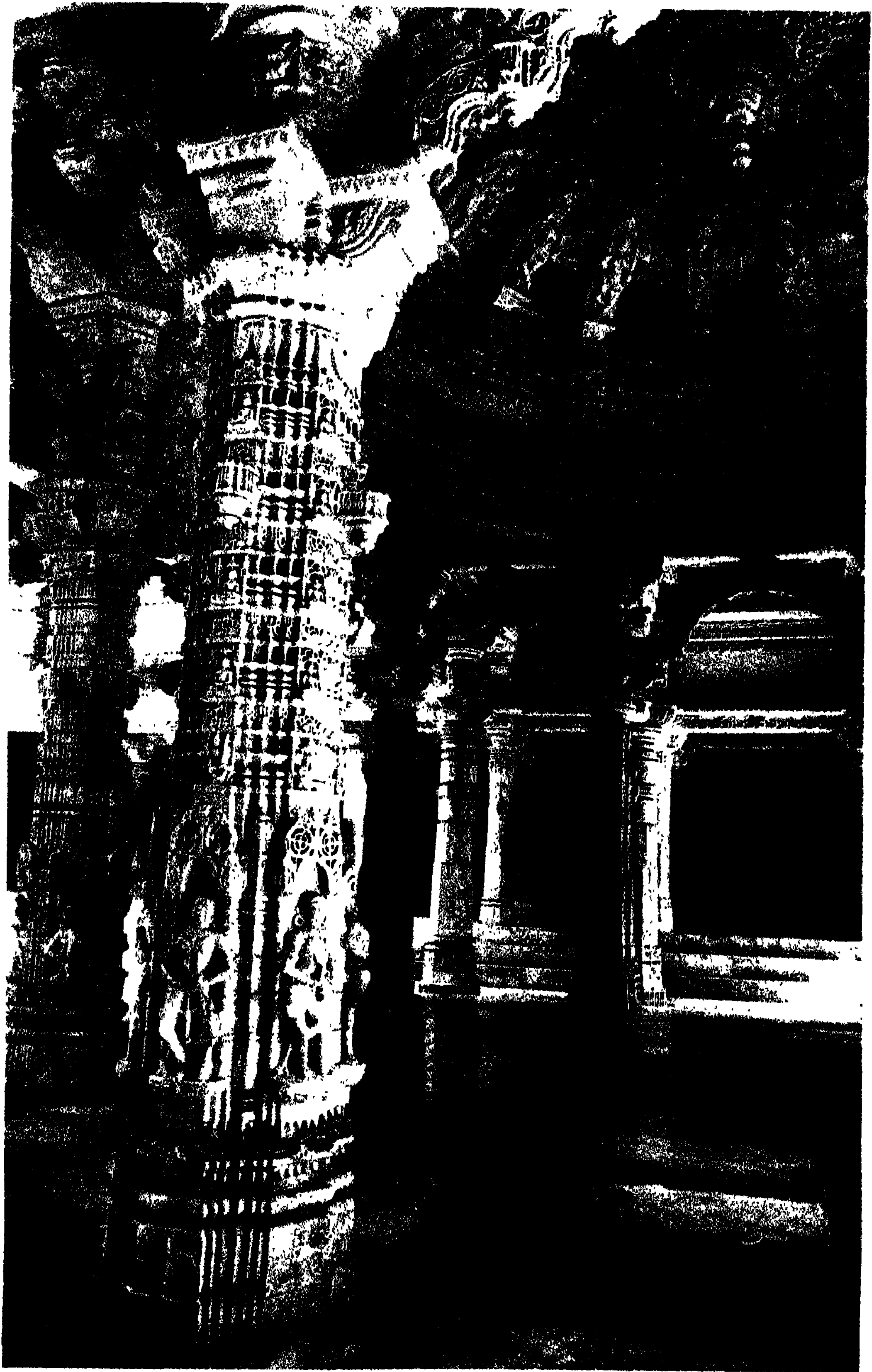
This temple is a *nirandhāra-prāsāda*, which means there is no inner ambulatory in the sanctum. It is located in oblong courtyard of 40 x 23 m, surrounded by a row of 52 *devakulikās* with a colonnaded corridor. The temple faces east. Outside the entrance of the temple but in the same axis as the sanctum and its three halls is a domed entrance hall, *balāṇaka;* adjoining this is a portrait gallery called *hastiśālā.*

This temple is dedicated to the first *tīrthaṅkara* Ādinātha whose image, in a state of meditation, *dhyānamudrā*, is installed on a pedestal in the *garbhagṛha.*

The image is made of white marble and has an ornate frame with five *jinas*, making it a *saparikara pañcatīrthī* image. The present image in the temple, however, is not original; it was installed in 1332 A.D.

The ground-plan and the vertical section of the Vimalavasāhi temple, it has been suggested, has some of the essential features of the Keśava temple at Somnathpur in Karnataka.[8]

The *gūḍhamaṇḍapa* at Abu corresponds with the central *maṇḍapa* of the Keśava temple. The *garbhagṛha* at Vimalavasāhi



Raṅgamaṇḍapa in the Lunavasāhi temple, with dancing and *jina* figures on the column.

adjoins the *gūḍhamaṇḍapa* on the west side, whereas at Somnathpur it is separated from the *maṇḍapa* by a small vestibule. The south and the north sides of the porches of the *gūḍhamaṇḍapa* project far forward, giving the ground-plan the form of a cross.

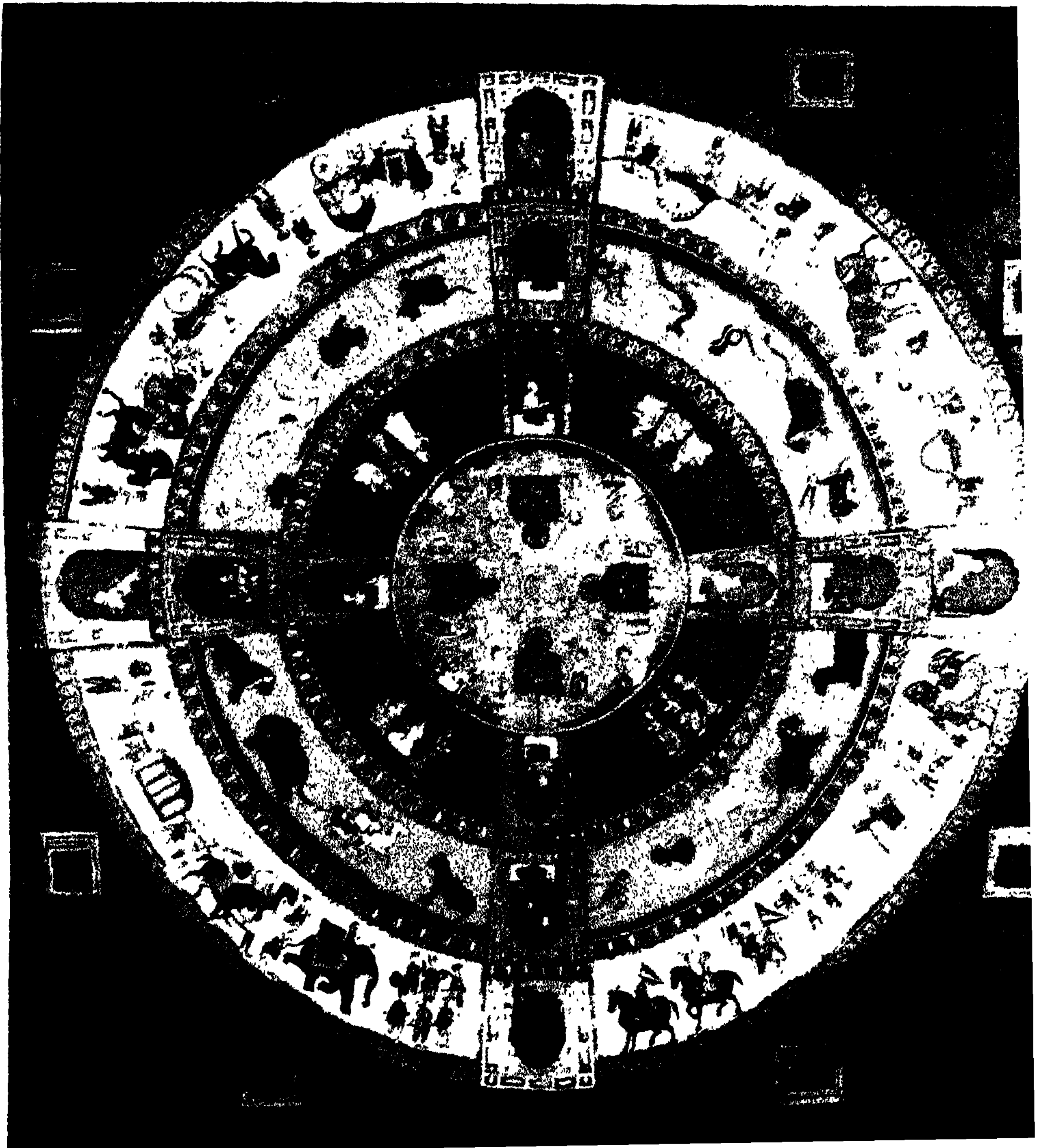
Samavasaraṇa-paṭṭā, an assembly of devotees who have come to hear a *tīrthaṅkara* preach the doctrine.

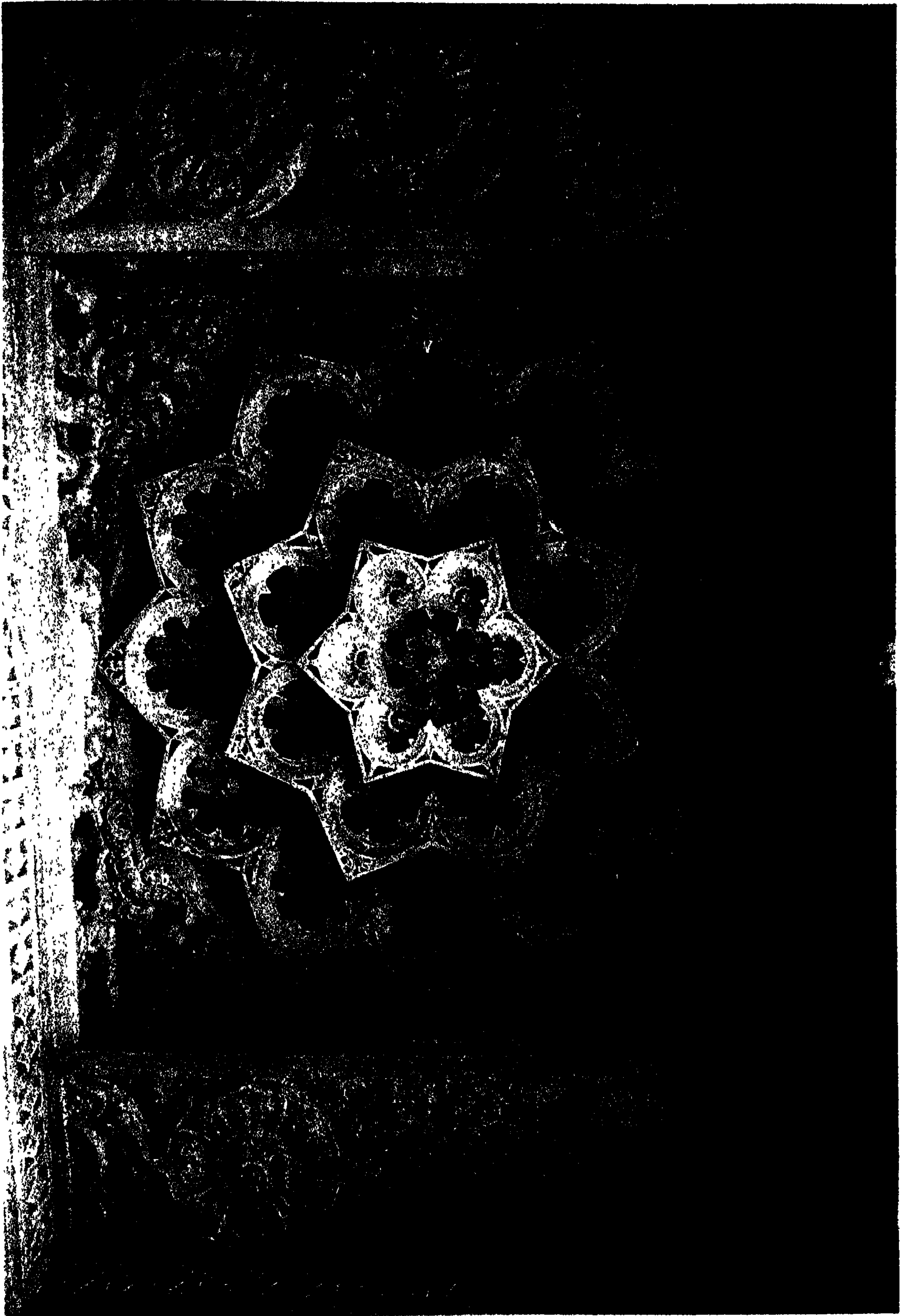
Early 19th century, Rajasthan.

Courtesy: Ravi Kumar, *The Jain Cosmology*.

Gūḍhamaṇḍapa

The *gūḍhamaṇḍapa* of the Vimalavasāhi temple is entered through an ornate door from the front east side, as well as from the north and the south. The frame on the front door comprises of six mouldings, and is known as *ṣaṭśākha*. The lower part of the jambs is decorated by framed figures of four-armed standing *vidyādevīs*, Rohiṇī and Vairoṭyā, accompanied by *caurī*-bearers and pitcher carriers. The niches show *yakṣa* Sarvānubhūti and *yakṣī* Ambikā,





Lotus flower on a ceiling in north portico in the Lunavasāhi temple.

both with four arms, and seated in *lalitāsana*. The *gūḍhamaṇḍapa* has two images in white marble of *tīrthaṅkara* Pārśvanātha standing in *kāyotsargamudrā* with hands hanging on both sides. Both of these images were installed in 1351 A.D.

Mukhamaṇḍapa or Navacaukī

This small columnar hall, the *navacaukī*, is located in front of the *gūḍhamaṇḍapa* and is landed from the *raṅgamaṇḍapa* by three stairways, each comprising three steps.

The *navacaukī* is divided into nine bays and each bay contains an ornate ceiling of many different varieties: domical, *padmanābha*, flat or *samatala*, domical of the *sabhāmandāraka* order, etc. In the *navacaukī*, on either side of the *gūḍhamaṇḍapa* door is an ornamental niche called *khattaka*. Each *khattaka* has a *saparikara* image of Ādinātha seated in *dhyānamudrā*.

In the south bay of the *navacaukī* in Vimalavasāhi temple, is a *samatala* ceiling with a finely carved *kalpalatā* — 'a creeper of wish fulfilment'. In one corner of the relief is a *vidyādhara* hovering with folded hands.

Pīṭha

The *pīṭha* — 'the member between the ground and the podium' — of the *navacaukī* in Vimalavasāhi temple has some very interesting features. On the lateral sides it consists of a plinth decorated with half diamonds, a deep fillet carved with diamonds, a *chajjikā* — 'an inverted cyma recta', a *grāsapaṭṭī* — 'a moulding decorated with *kīrttimukhas*', and a *narathara* — 'a moulding decorated with human figures'. The *narathara* depicts *padmāsana jina* with worshippers, milkmaids churning milk, warriors and fighting scenes.

Raṅgamaṇḍapa

The dome in the *raṅgamaṇḍapa* or *nṛtya-maṇḍapa* — 'the dancing pavilion' — in the Vimalavasāhi temple is very ornate and a work of exquisite craftsmanship.

Over seven metres in diameter, its height from floor to the apex extends to over nine metres. This kind of dome is known as *sabhāpadmamandāraka*, a composite ceiling consisting of several courses that comprise *sabhāmārga* (a ceiling specially built in the *raṅgamaṇḍapa*), *padmaka* (a ceiling where the pendants of the lotus are predominantly shown), and *mandāraka* (a ceiling consisting of the central pendant of the lotus) elements. The dome is composed of eleven circular courses and a long circular *padmaśilā*, the central lotus pendant.[9]

The inner face of the first course is decorated with a row of elephants; its underside at eight angles of the octagon and on the slightly projected north and south sides is relieved with creepers.

The second course is *karaṇadardarikā* (a moulding of the ceiling consisting of cyma reverse with arris), topped by a band of *kīrttimukhas*.

The third course represents images of four-armed *lalitāsana* goddesses in projecting niches and attendant figures in alternate recesses.

The fourth course is *gajatālu* (literally 'an elephant's palate'; in architecture, a coffered course in a ceiling decorated with rafters).

The fifth course depicts figures of musicians and dancers, and of warriors carrying weapons.

The sixth course is again *gajatālu*.

The seventh course is carved with figures of horse-riders.

The eighth and the ninth courses consist of thirty-two-foil and twenty-eight-foil *kolas* (literally, 'pig's tusk'; in architecture, a cusped course in a ceiling decorated with rafters), each foil containing a stamenal tube clasped by one row of petals of the lotus.

The tenth course carries images of two-armed standing goddesses Cakreśvarī and Vajraśṛṅkhalā and figures of *caurī*-bearers.

The eleventh circular comprises of two circular panels: the outer panel has a band of geese and twelve projecting *lūmās* (decorative motifs of the ceiling consisting of lotus pendants); the inner panel has figures of pitcher bearers.

Surrounding the principal pendant of the lotus are twelve smaller pendants or *lūmās*, each one of which resembles a serrated diamond, consisting of an eight-foil reverse *kola*, an eight-foil normal *kola*, a long stamenal tube clasped by a band of dancers and musicians, and one row of petals.

The central pendant of the lotus, *padmaśilā*, consists of two courses of eight-foil and six-foil *kolas* and a figural band between them representing horse-riders, elephants and a chariot drawn by human figures. Between the *kola* courses is also placed a reverse *gajatālu*.

From the *padmaśilā* issues a long stamenal tube clasped by a band of dancers and musicians and one row of petals.

The ornamental domical ceiling of the *raṅgamaṇḍapa* is supported on an octagonal frame of architraves put across the central pillars; in all there are twelve pillars disposed along the four sides of the square central nave.

All the pillars are of the square type, with corners chamfered into three angles. The shaft of the pillars has four sections: square, octagonal, sixteen-sided and circular. The circular section is carved into two belts: the lower belt is carved with figures of *śrāvakas* and *śrāvikās* carrying water pitchers, warriors, horse-riders, elephants with drivers, *gandharvas* and *vidyādharas*, lotus scrolls and diamonds. The upper belt is surmounted by a band of *kīrttimukhas*.


Sixteen *vidyādevīs* in the *raṅgamaṇḍapa* in the Vimalavasāhi temple.

The sixteen-sided section, to be observed only in two pillars, carries sixteen figures of dancers and musicians.

The octagonal section bears eight figures of *lalitāsana* or standing gods or goddesses, and dancers and musicians.

The square section carries framed figures of Sarvānubhūti, Sarasvatī, *yakṣa* and *yakṣī*, and *vidyādevī*, all with four arms.

The four corners at the base of the dome in the *raṅgamaṇḍapa* in the Vimalavasāhi temple carry four finely carved and significant figures of Jain iconography. Each of these four images is accompanied on both sides by a female *caurī*-bearer and some other attendant figures. The images in three corners — northwest, southeast and northeast — are of three *yakṣas*, and in the fourth of *yakṣī* Ambikā.

The six-armed *yakṣa* Brahmaśānti rides a swan and holds an umbrella and a lotus in the upper two hands, a book and *abhayamudrā* in the middle hands, and *varadamudrā* and a water pot in the lower ones.

In the southeast corner, *yakṣa* Kapardi or Iśānendra is a ten-armed god in a dancing attitude. He carries a cymbal, *śūci mudrā*, an *aṅkuśa* and *varadamudrā* in the right hands, and *abhayamudrā*, lotus, *vajra* and cymbal in the left ones.

In the northeast corner is *yakṣa* Sarvānubhūti. His mount is elephant, represented beside his right leg, and he holds in his six arms money bags, goad and noose, *varadamudrā* and fruit.

A magnificent image of *yakṣī* Ambikā, described later in detail, is in the fourth corner; it is amongst the finest images of Ambikā anywhere.

It has been remarked that the architects of the Vimalavasāhi and Lunavasāhi temples at Dilwara "reached the limits of what was statically possible in the corbelling of the courses of the low domes"[10] above the *raṅgamaṇḍapa*. The corbel-vaulting, with tiers of concentric rings, "supported only by columns, rises above an octagon consisting of architrave."[11] However, such a dome would not be conceivable "as a pure corbelled construction with the lines of force running exclusively in a vertical direction. The easiest solution would have been to use clamps to anchor the slabs of each ring together. If this had been done, the horizontal thrust could have been absorbed without difficulty. Since the temples at Mount Abu are still in use, it has not been possible to verify whether clamps were in fact used."[12] It has been suggested by structural engineers that rather than using the clamps, "a large part of the horizontal thrust is absorbed by the joints through frictional resistance. The fact that the dancing pavilion was combined in every direction with the surrounding halls by a network of architraves, although there was no ritual necessity for this, strengthens our hypothesis that this was intended to divert some of the thrust on to other architectural elements."[13]



The birth of Krsna in the southwest bay of the *rangamandapa* in the Lunavasāhi. It is one of the finest ceilings in this temple. This ceiling consists of two square courses. The inner face of the first course is carved with a band of leaves and a band of lotus scrolls, while its underside depicts sixteen *lūmās*, each comprising of two rows of eight curved petals and a flower bud in the centre. The second square is *samatala*, a flat surface, with scenes from the birth of Krsna. The scenes are arranged, one within the other, in four square panels, projected towards the centre

Low corbelled domes like that at Mount Abu are to be found in Jain temples in many parts of India. The domes are frequently surrounded by spacious pilaster halls, so that the eight columns below the octagonal architrave should not have to bear the thrust alone.

To bring the vertical pressure of the dome over the column, *toraṇa*-arches are thrown between the columns.

On each of the lateral sides the *raṅgamaṇḍapa* is attached by a portico. Each portico comprises of six bays with its roof supported by a row of four pillars placed east-west on the floor of the courtyard. In addition, four squat pilasters placed right above the *devakulikā* columns on the one end and four nave pillars on the other support the roof of the portico. The bays have a variety of ceilings: shallow domical, *sabhāmandāraka* or *mandāraka* variety, *samautkṣipta* of the *padmamandāraka* variety. These ceilings have elaborate ornamentation and sculptural work, some of much iconographic significance.

The Lunavasāhi or The Tejahpāla Temple

By year 1220 A.D. the political power had passed from the Caulukyas to the Vaghelas, whose ministers Vastupāla and Tejahpāla came to be considered amongst the great builders in the history of Indian art and architecture. The two brothers built well over fifty temples and restored and renovated numerous others. Vastupāla built the Vastupāla-vihāra and Pārśvanātha temple at Girnar, Indra-*maṇḍapa* and six other temples at Satrunjaya, Ādinātha temple at Dholaka and Aṣṭapada-*prāsāda* at Prabhasa. His brother Tejahpāla built the Asarāja-*vihāras* at Patan and Junagadh, Neminātha temple at Dholaka, Ādinātha temple at Prabhasa and the temples at Khambhat and Dabhoi. He also built temples at Tharad, Karnavati, Godhara, Pavagadh and Navasari. But the most famous, and the most distinguished of them all is the Lunavasāhi temple — also known as the Tejahpāla Temple — at Mount Abu. This temple is dedicated to the twenty-second *tīrthaṅkara* Neminātha and was built in 1231 A.D.

Like the Vimalavasāhi, the sanctum and *gūḍhamaṇḍapa* of Lunavasāhi are plain and have *phāṁsanā*-roofs.

The general plan of this temple is similar to the Vimalavasāhi, but the entrance porch, *balāṇka*, is absent here and the *hastiśālā* is built at the back of the temple, thus removing all *devakulikās* on the east side of the temple.

The temple is entered from the west and the main deity faces west. Inside the sanctum is a *saparikara* image in black stone of *tīrthaṅkara* Neminātha installed on a high moulded pedestal made of white marble.

Mukhamaṇḍapa or Navacaukī

As in the Vimalavasāhi temple, there are nine bays in the *navacaukī* in the Lunavasāhi temple. Each of these bays has a highly ornamental ceiling, some of them of extraordinary elegance, cut with the delicacy of an ivory carver.

Composed of a square *padmaśilā* and three rectangular courses, the ceiling in the central bay is *kṣiptotkṣipta*, 'a composite ceiling of several elements', of the *padmamandāraka* mode. The three courses project thirty, twenty-two and fourteen *lūmās* respectively. The ceiling is raised up by a rectangular frame of four slabs slightly projecting into the space of the ceiling. The underside of these slabs is carved with half lotuses with stalks. This ceiling is a work of commanding beauty.

Consisting of seven courses and a circular *padmaśilā*, the domical ceiling in the northwest bay is of *sabhāmandāraka* variety. The faces of the various courses are decorated with lotus scrolls, *kīrttimukhas*, and lotus petal-and-bud ornaments. In this ceiling the petals and buds are cut with an exquisite delicacy.

A breathtaking display of full, half and quarter *lūmās* in the four corners, the centre and four cardinal points makes this ceiling in the northeast bay of the *navacaukī* in Lunavasāhi temple an outstanding achievement. This kind of ceiling is known as a *kṣipta vitana* belonging to a *nābhicchanda* order; this ceiling is amongst the best of its kind.

Consisting of seven receding courses, this ceiling in the south bay is masterly in its treatment of the various decorative elements and icons. Its various courses are decorated with lotus petals and scrolls, *kīrttimukhas, campaka* flowers, and lotus petal-and-bud motifs. The twenty-four *tīrthaṅkaras* are shown seated in *dhyānamudrā*.

In the *navacauki*, flanking the *gūḍhamaṇḍapa* door are two ornamental niches, *khattakas*. Jinas, Śāntinātha on the right and Sambhavanātha on the left, in *dhyānamudrā* are seated in the niches.

Raṅgamaṇḍapa

As in Vimalavasāhi, the *raṅgamaṇḍapa* in Lunavasāhi consists of twelve pillars disposed along the four sides of a square platform. Eight of these pillars form an octagon and support a highly ornate domical ceiling.

The domical ceiling in the *raṅgamaṇḍapa* is of *sabhāpadmamandāraka* type, with a commanding central lotus pendant — the *padmaśilā*. The ceiling is a work of overwhelming beauty, elegant proportions and rich ornamentation.

The dome is almost three metres in radius, and consists of ten circular courses.

The inner face of the first course displays a *kapota* decorated with a band of leaves and *caitya*-arches at intervals, a deep fillet carved with diamonds, and a figural band representing *śrāvakas*.

The second course, slightly projected into the space of the dome, is *rūpapaṭṭikā*, a figural belt, decorated with images of the ascetics. Behind their heads is a band carved with diamonds.

The third course is *karṇadardarikā*, a moulding, embellished with stencilled lotus petals and surmounted by a row of projecting leaves and a strip of diamonds.

The fourth course is *rūpakaṇṭha*, another figural belt, representing seventy-two figures of *jinas* seated in *dhyānamudrā*.



Eight *vidyādevīs* in a domical ceiling in south portico in the Vimalavasāhi temple.

The fifth course is *gajatālu* underlined by a band of garland loops filled with plumes and carrying pairs of geese on their outer edges, surmounted by a strip of diamonds.

The sixth course consists *of gajatālus* as well but is topped by a band of leaves and a strip of stepped diamonds.

The seventh course is again *gajatālu* surmounted by a band of leaves and a strip of lozenges.

The eighth course consists of sixteen whorls of *kola;* its triangular spaces are occupied by *kīrttimukhas.*

The ninth course displays twenty-four projecting *lūmās;* between the *lūmās* are placed small lotus flowers.

The tenth course consists of twenty-four foil *kolas.* In the centre of each foil is represented a small lotus flower, while between the foils on the outer edge are inserted lotus buds.

In the dome, in the fourth course project out sixteen bracket figures of six-armed *vidyādharas* playing on various musical instruments, or carrying fly-whisk, garland or lotus, or standing in some dance postures. These bracket figures support a complete set of sixteen *vidyādevīs.*



A domical ceiling in the portico in the Lunavasāhi temple. Shaped like a lotus, it has several courses and a pendant.

The *padmaśilā*, 'the central pendant of the lotus', consists of seven courses of thirty-two-foil *kola* each and a *padmakeśara*, 'the stamenal tube inserted into the ceiling', clasped by two rows of petals and a band of dancers and musicians. The *padmakeśara* ends in a flower bud. Built on the principle of coradial regression, the *padmaśilā* is made up of one solid block and looks like a cluster of lotuses.

The four corners formed at the base of the dome in the *raṅgamaṇḍapa* have some interesting sculptural pieces.

The triangular space in the northwest corner is narrowed by two triangular courses. The lower course consists of a lotus decorated with stencilled lotus petals and crowned by a band of *ardhapadma*, 'half-lotus', pattern. The upper course is decorated with a row of *campaka* flowers.

The corner in the southwest direction also consists of triangular courses, but here the upper course projects over the lower. The inner course of the lower course is adorned with lotus scrolls, while its underside depicts a row of *campaka* flowers. The inner face of the upper course is carved with *gajatālu*, while its underside is incised with foliate scrolls.

In the northeast corner is an image of an eight-armed god with attendants. He carries a *triśūla*, a lotus and a fruit in the right hands, and a spear and a *varadākṣa* in the left hands; other arms are damaged. A boar and a lion are shown near the legs of the god.

In the southeast corner is an image of *yakṣa* Brahmaśānti flanked on both sides by attendants carrying a pitcher, a flag and a garland. The six-armed god carries a lotus and a ladle in the upper pair of hands, *abhayamudrā* and *vajra* in the middle, and *varadākṣa* and pitcher in the lower ones. He wears a beard and has a swan as his *vāhana*.

Attached to the *raṅgamaṇḍapa*, and supported by a row of twelve pillars, are open porticos on three sides. These twelve pillars are of two types: square and octagonal. Of the two square-type pillars, the base consists of *bhiṭṭa*, *khura*, *kumbha* decorated with *udgama* pattern, *kalaśa*, *antarapatra* and *kapota* underlined with leaves. The shaft of the pillars is divided into four sections: square, octagonal, sixteen-sided and circular. Some parts of the shaft are plain, others are decorated with miniature *śikharas*, lotus petals, diamonds, and *kīrttimukhas*.

Of the ten octagonal-type pillars, the base consists of two *bhiṭṭas*, a *khura*, a *kumbha* decorated with half diamonds, a *kalaśa*, an *antarapatra*, and a *kapota* adorned with *caitya*-arch ornament. The shaft of this type of pillars is octagonal at the base, sixteen sided in the middle and circular at the top.



Basal corner in the *rangamandapa* in the Vimalavasāhi temple, an image of *yakṣa* Brahmaśānti. The six-armed god holds an umbrella and a lotus in the upper two hands, book and *abhayamudrā* in the middle hands, and *varadamudrā* and water pot in the lower ones His mount is a swan.



Again, some parts of the pillars are plain, and others are decorated with lotus petals, *kīrttimukhas*, miniature *śikharas* and diamonds.

Each portico is divided into six bays supported by the pillars of the *raṅgamaṇḍapa* on one side, and the pillar-capitals placed right above the *devakulikā* pillars on the other; in the middle they are supported by the pillars of the portico itself. The space between the pillar-capitals in the central bay of the south portico is decorated with sculptural panel, depicting Gaja-Lakṣmī in the centre and a Kinnara-couple and a sculpted niche on each side. On either side of the panel is a fine sculpture of a swan with a human rider carrying a water pot. In the west portico, goddess Ambikā, with four arms and in *lalitāsana*, flanked on each side by dancers and musicians, is depicted.

Each bay has an ornate ceiling supported on rectangular or square frame of architraves.

In the southern portico the description of the six ceilings is as follows:

The ceiling in the northeast bay is *samautkṣipta* — a composite of flat and projecting elements — of the *mandāraka* variety. Square on plan it consists of two courses, first octagonal and the second, twelve-sided, with flat central area. The inner face of the first is decorated with diamonds, while its underside on each corner depicts a *kīrttimukha* in an arch of creepers issuing forth from its mouth. The second, accommodated in *gajatālu*, represents *mandāraka*, lotus ceiling, elements in three concentric circles. A work of exquisite beauty, this ceiling is carved in high relief, with lotus represented in most fascinating detail.

The domical ceiling in the north bay has figures of two *jinas* in *dhyānamudrā*. It consists of four courses and a central pendant. The inner face of the first course is decorated with a row of geese, while its underside at each corner depicts a *kīrttimukha* in an arch of creepers issuing forth from its mouth. The other three courses consist of *padmas*, each carved with lotus petal-and-bud motif. The pendant represents an open *campaka* flower comprising two rows of petals.

The ceiling in the southeast bay consists of two square courses, the first projecting into space of the ceiling and the second occupying the central area.

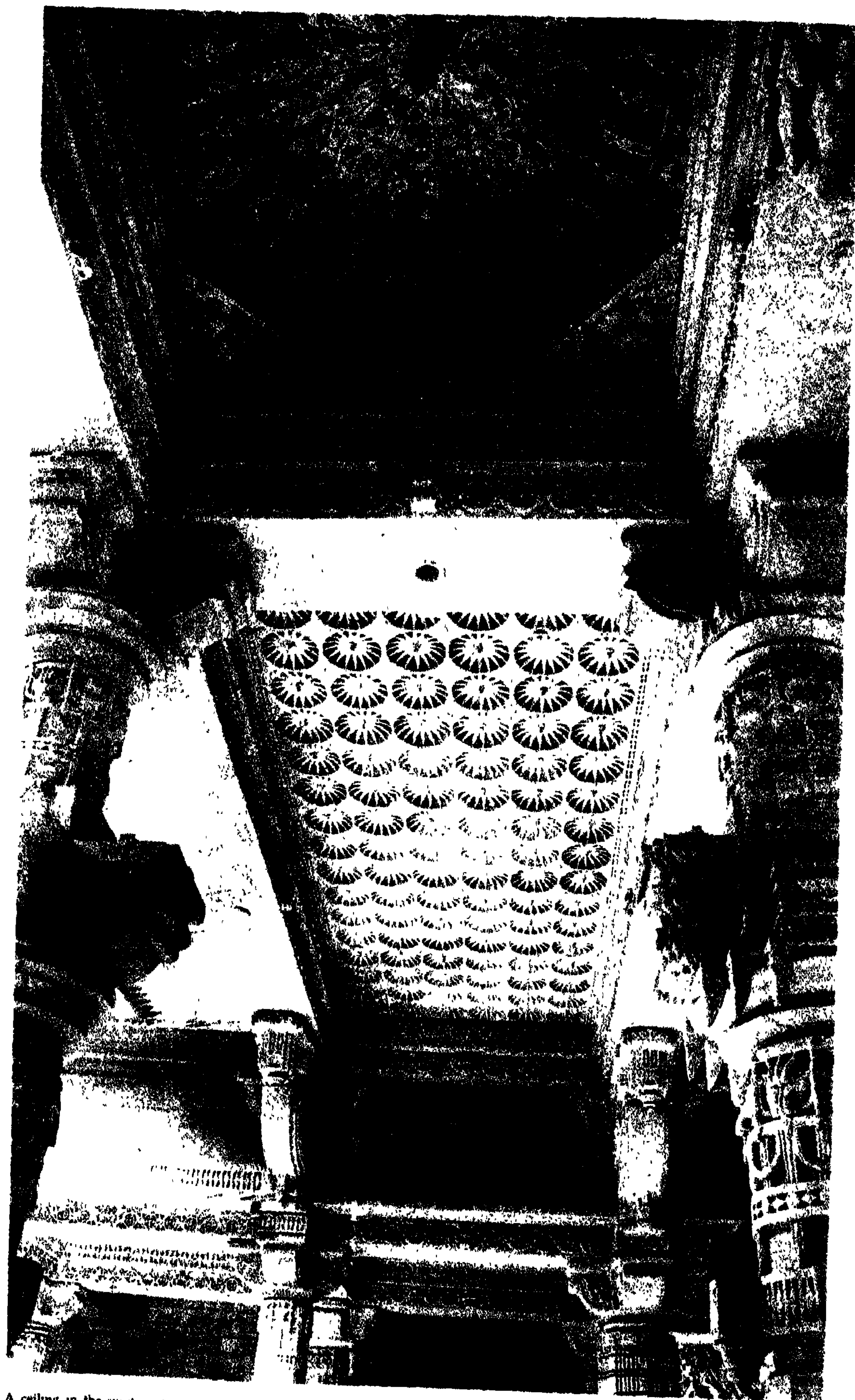
The ceiling in the northwest bay is square on plan. It depicts nine very slightly projecting *lūmās* in three lines of three each.

A group of thirty-two dancers on a ceiling in the west portico of the *raṅgamaṇḍapa* in the Lunavasāhi temple. The ceiling consists of two circular courses and a large circular ceiling slab. The first course is octagonal and it depicts geese and a *kīrttimukha* at each corner. On the projected part of the second course stand

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Ceiling in the southwest bay in the *navacaukī* in the Lunavasāhi temple. It is a domical ceiling of the *sabhāpadmamandāraka* variety. On the two slabs defining the ceiling are carved rows of lotus flowers with stalks and a band of lotus petals. The ceiling is composed of six courses and a circular *padmaśilā*. Each one of the four corners is occupied by a fine image of Gaja-Lakṣmī seated in *padmāsana* on a throne supported by elephants. The eight-armed goddess is flanked on each side by an elephant carrying water pot in its trunk. Two men are sitting on the elephant; they are also carrying water pots.

A work of originality and elegance, the ceiling is the only one of its kind in the Dilwara temples.



A ceiling in the west portico in the Lunavasāhi temple. It consists of two courses and a large circular ceiling slab. Thirty-two female dancers are shown on one of its projected courses, there is also a row of *campaka* flowers on its underside. The flat surface of the circular slab shows a full-blown lotus flower with two rows of petals. Each of the petals is occupied by a dancer.

The *samatala* ceiling shows 102 *campaka* flowers arranged east-west in six rows of seventeen flowers each.

The panel depicts goddess Ambikā with five attendants and dancers on each side. She holds a child on her left knee

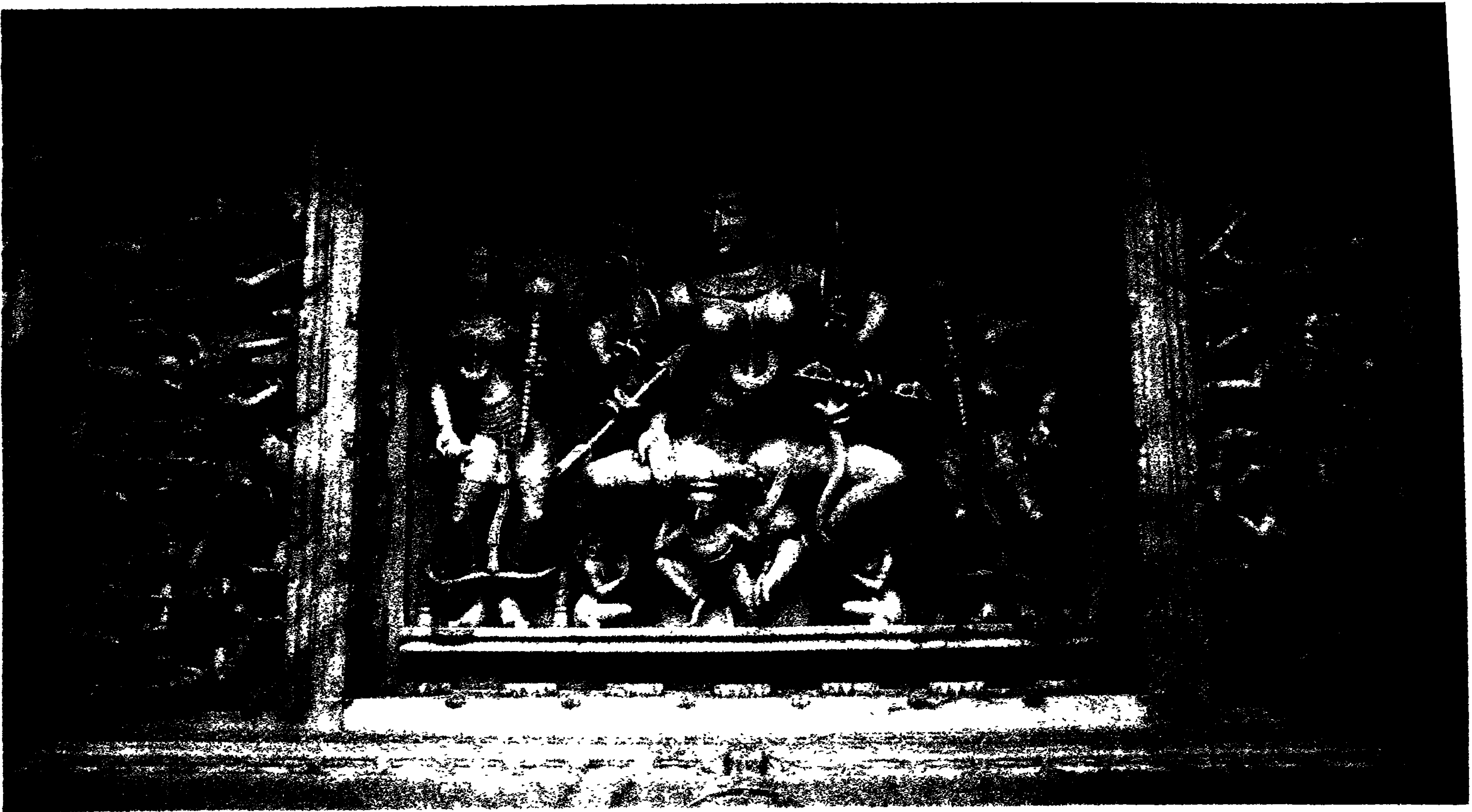
thirty-two dancers. The flat surface of the circular slab displays a full-blown lotus flower, with two rows of petals, one with twelve petals and the other with twenty-four. Each of these petals is occupied by a dancer. It is a delicate work, exquisitely created.

A group of dancers and musicians is depicted on a ceiling in the west portico of the *raṅgamaṇḍapa* of the Lunavasāhi temple. The ceiling is domical of the *sabhāmandāraka* order. The inner face of the square frame placed over the architraves depicts figures of dancers and musicians. The ceiling is composed of three courses and a circular *padmaśilā*.

Campaka flowers are carved on a *samatala* ceiling in the west portico of the *raṅgamaṇḍapa* of the Lunavasāhi temple. The flowers are arranged in six rows of seventeen flowers each. The spaces between the flowers are occupied by concave-sided diamonds.

There are forty-eight *devakulikās* on all sides of the temple except the east. They are screened by two arcades of pillars, forming thus two bays in front of each *devakulikā*.

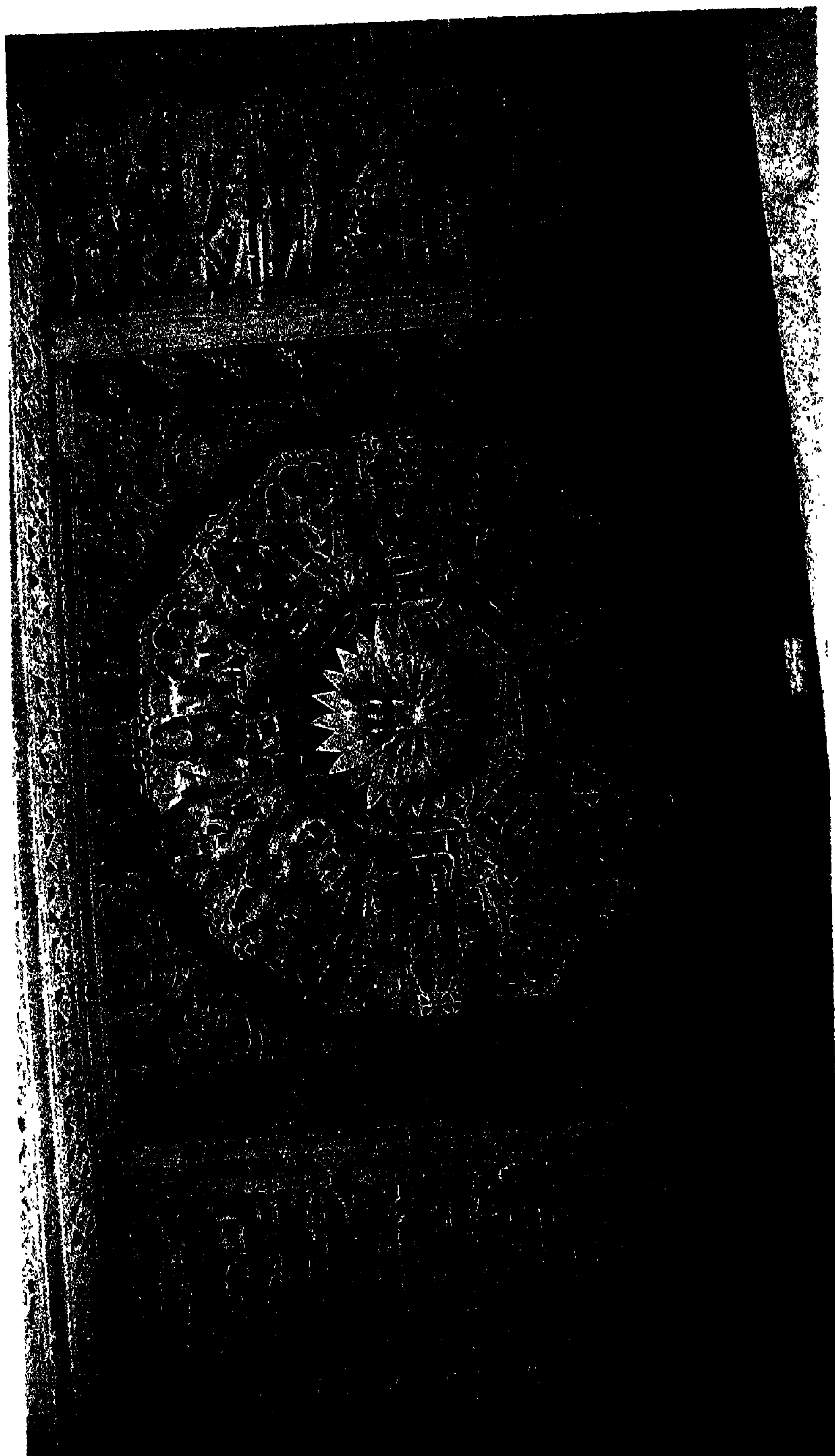
In front of one of the *devakulikās*, the square *samatala* ceiling is divided into nine compartments. The cardinal compartments are relieved with images of *lalitāsana vidyādevīs*, two with four arms and two with six arms. The other compartments depict full-blown lotus flowers with two rows of petals. The corners are filled with *kīrttimukhas*.



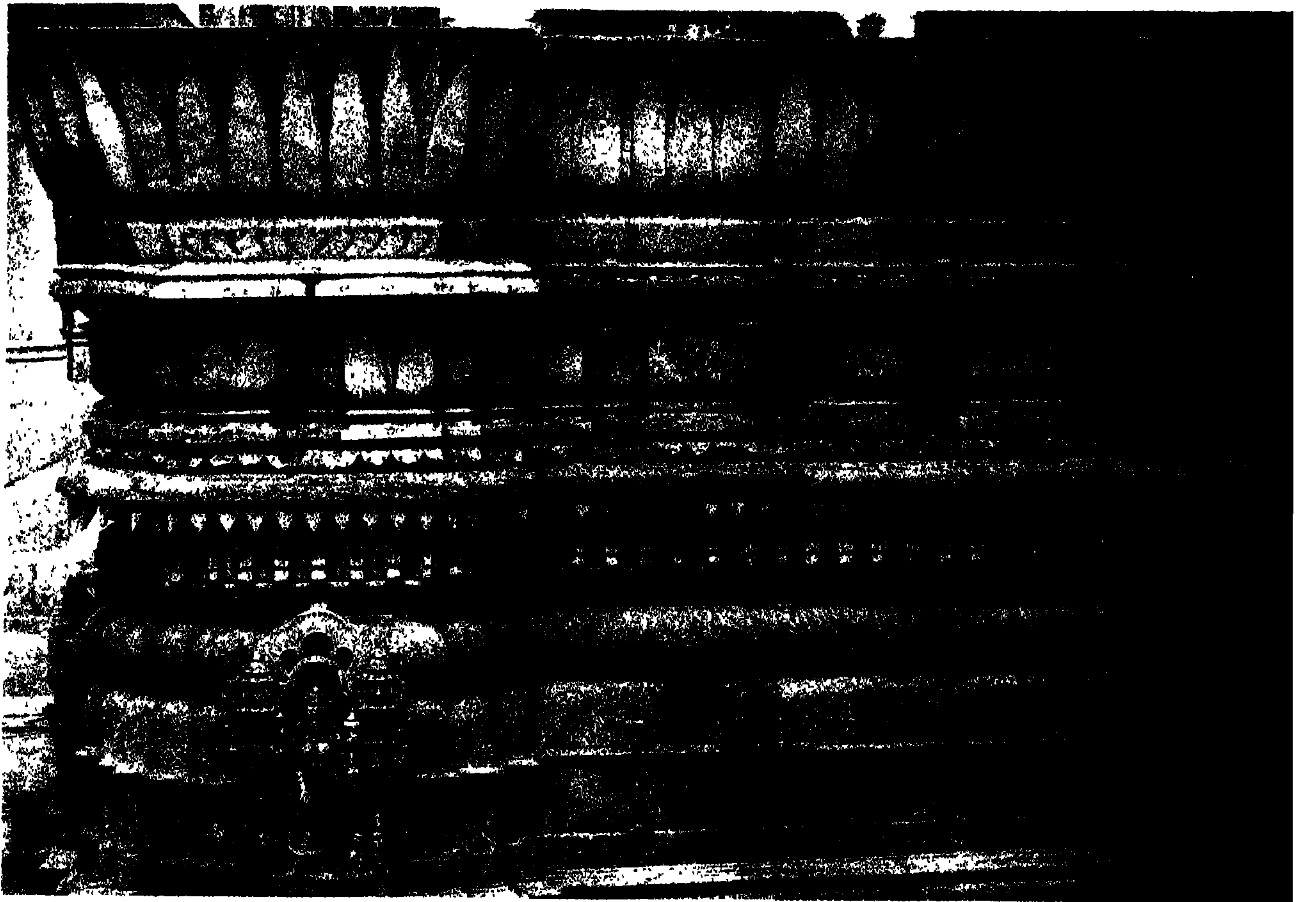
Goddess Cakreśvarī, seated in *lalitāsana*, on a corridor ceiling in the Vimalavasāhi temple
On her either side are *caurī*-bearers



An eight-armed *yakṣa* in the northeast corner of the *rangamaṇḍapa* in the Lunavasāhi temple. He is accompanied by several female attendants. He carries lotus, *triśūla* and fruit in the right hands, and a spear and *varadākṣa* in the left hands; his three hands are broken.



The *samatala* ceiling in the corridor depicts in a circle eight images of four-armed standing *vidyādevīs* interspersed with pair of devotees. At each corner of the square is a creeper-medallion. In the centre of the panel is a full-blown lotus flower.



Pītha in the Lunavasāhi temple.

Notes

1. Miller, B.S. Ed. *Exploring India's Sacred Art*, p. 20.
2. Ghosh, A. Ed. *Jaina Art and Architecture*, vol. I, pp. 5-6.
3. Amar, G. 'Architectural Traditions and Canons', p. 494.
4. For a comprehensive discussion, see: Deva, K. 'West India: Caulukya Temples', pp. 33-306.
5. For a historical and architectural description of the Jain temples in Western India, see: Singh, H. *Jaina Temples of Western India*.
6. *Jaina Art and Architecture*, p. 446.
7. Ibid.
8. Volwahsen, A. *Living Architecture: Indian*, p. 150.
9. For a detailed architectural and iconographic description of these temples, I have relied very extensively on the most comprehensive study by Singh, H., op. cit.
10. Volwahsen, A., op. cit., p. 177.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.



The Ādīśvara temple, Ranakpur

Chapter V

The Temple at Ranakpur

An Architectural Splendour

The magnificent temple at Ranakpur in Mewar is dedicated to the first *tīrthaṅkara* Ādinātha, or Ādīśvara or Yugadīśvara. The temple is designed as *caumukha* — with four faces — and is indisputably the finest example of its kind. Situated in a valley, this complex stands out among a number of Jain shrines at a place considered to be one of the five sacred sites in Mewar. An inscription on a pillar close to the entrance of its main shrine records that in 1439 A.D. Deepaka, an architect, constructed the building to the order of Dharanka, a devoted Jain.[1] From a reference in the inscription to Rana Kumbha (1438-68), the great king of Chitor, it appears that the Rana was the source of inspiration and support for the erection of this grand temple. Spread over an area of 3,716 square metres, comprising twenty-nine halls and four hundred and twenty pillars — of which no two are alike — the *caumukha* temple is indeed a monumental work.



The Ādīśvara temple, Ranakpur.



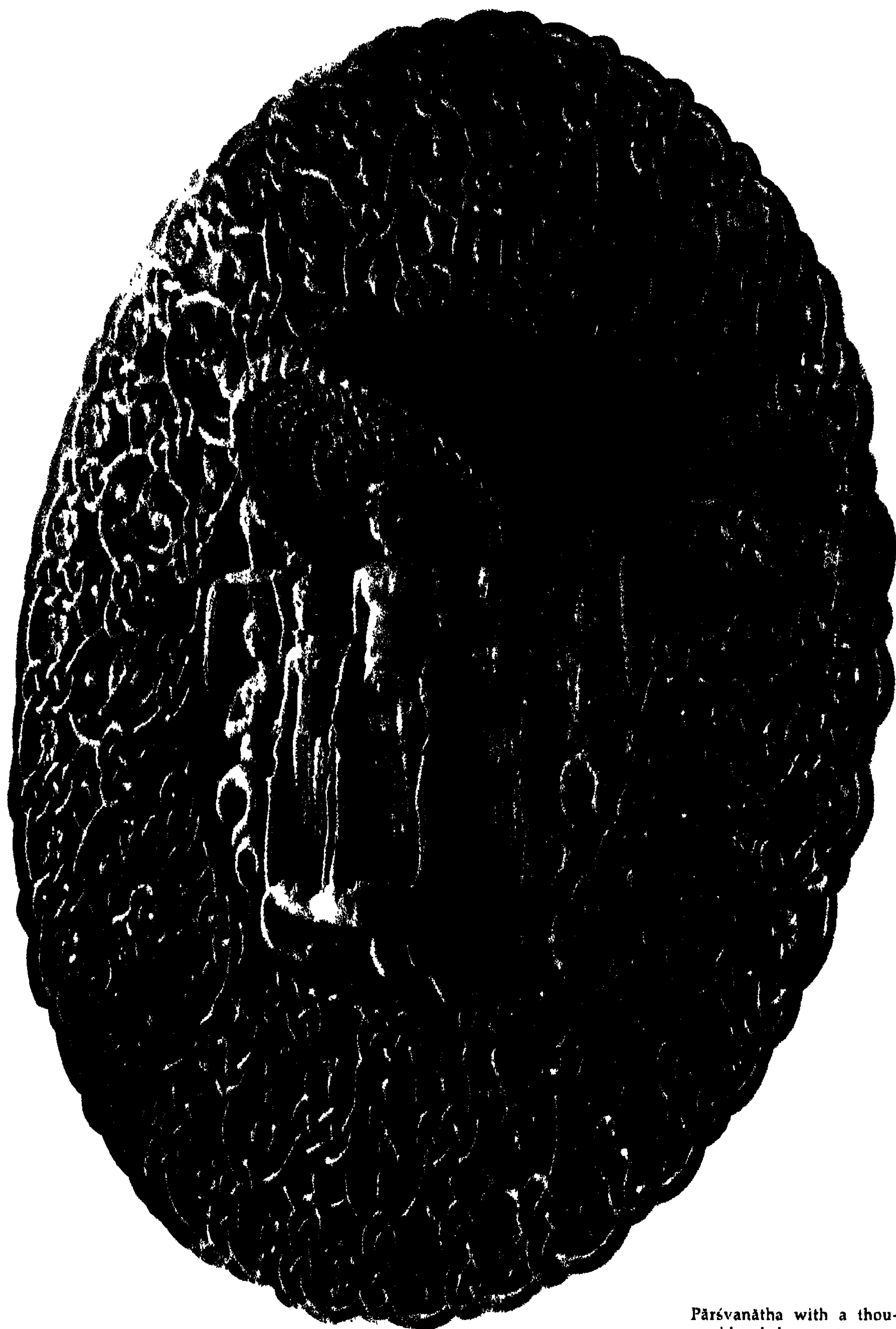
External icons and structures in the Ādīśvara temple, Ranakpur



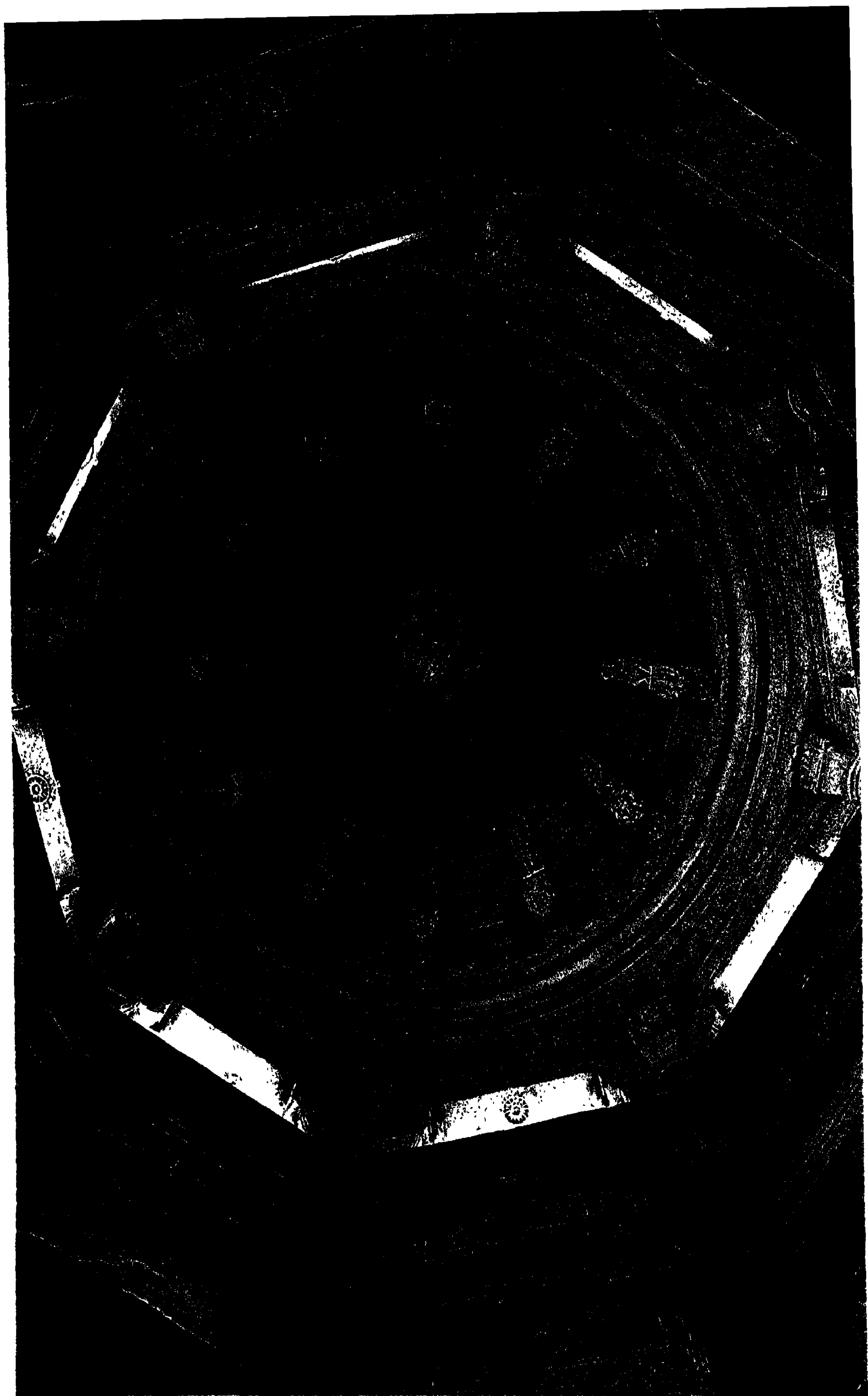
External view of the structure over the *garbhagṛha* of the Ādīśvara temple, Ranakpur.



Raṅgamaṇḍapa of the Ādīśvara temple, Ranakpur, north side



Pārśvanātha with a thousand-hooded serpent accompanied by *nāginī caurī*-bearers and *yakṣīs* In the coils of the serpent there are many nāginīs. Ādīśvara temple, Ranakpur.





An elephant paying homage to the deity, west gate, the Ādīśvara temple, Ranakpur.

It may be noted that a typical Jain sculpture, *sarvatobhadrikā pratimā*, with four faces, is called *caumukhī*. The earliest example of such a sculpture, with a square shaft and a *jina* figure on each face, comes from Mathura. The concept of *caumukhī*, however, is not unknown to the Buddhists or the Hindu sculptors. The miniature Buddhist stūpas sometimes bear representations of Buddha and Buddhist deities in niches on its four sides. Even the Great Stupa at Sanchi was given something of *a caumukhī* appearance by the installation of the Buddha image on each side.

On page 98

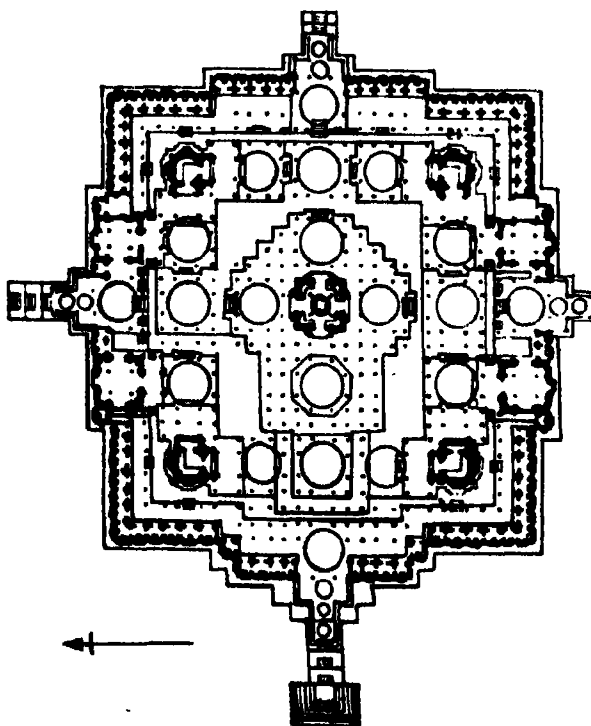
Dome of the *raṅgamaṇḍapa* in the west hall in the Ādīśvara temple, Ranakpur.





Dome, with 12 *vidyādevīs* and a *kinnara* couple in the Ādiśvara temple, Ranakpur.

Dome, with images of Ganeśa, *vidyādevīs,* musicians and dancers, in the south *raṅgamaṇḍapa* in the Ādiśvara temple, Ranakpur.



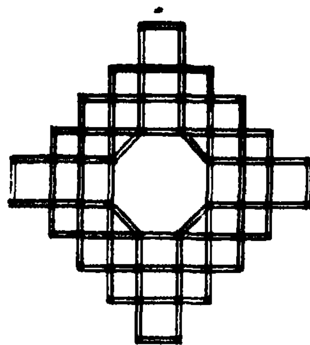


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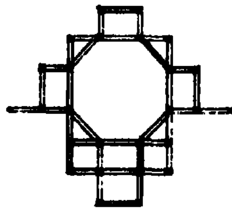


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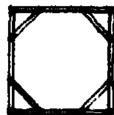


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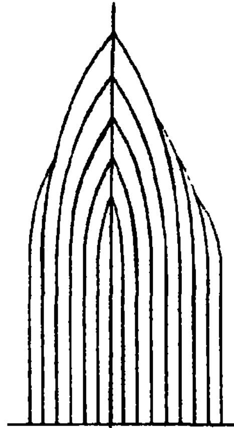


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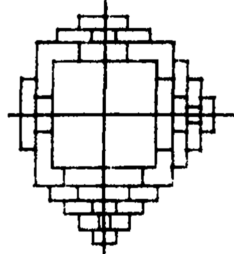


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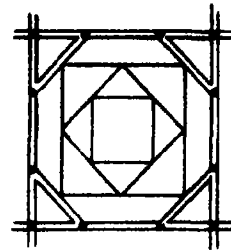


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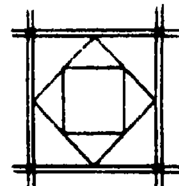


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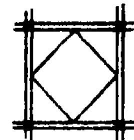
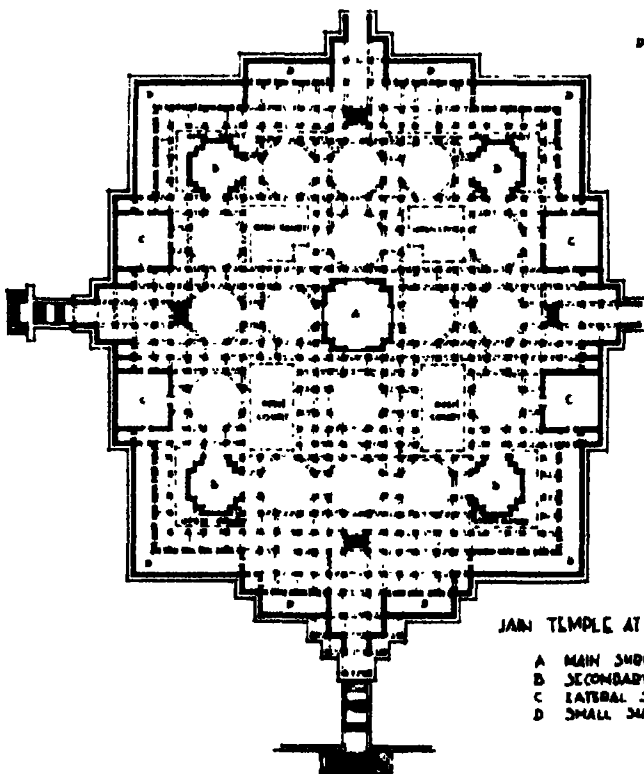
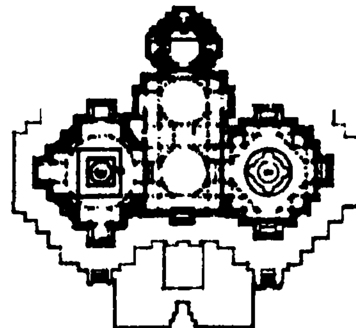


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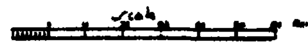


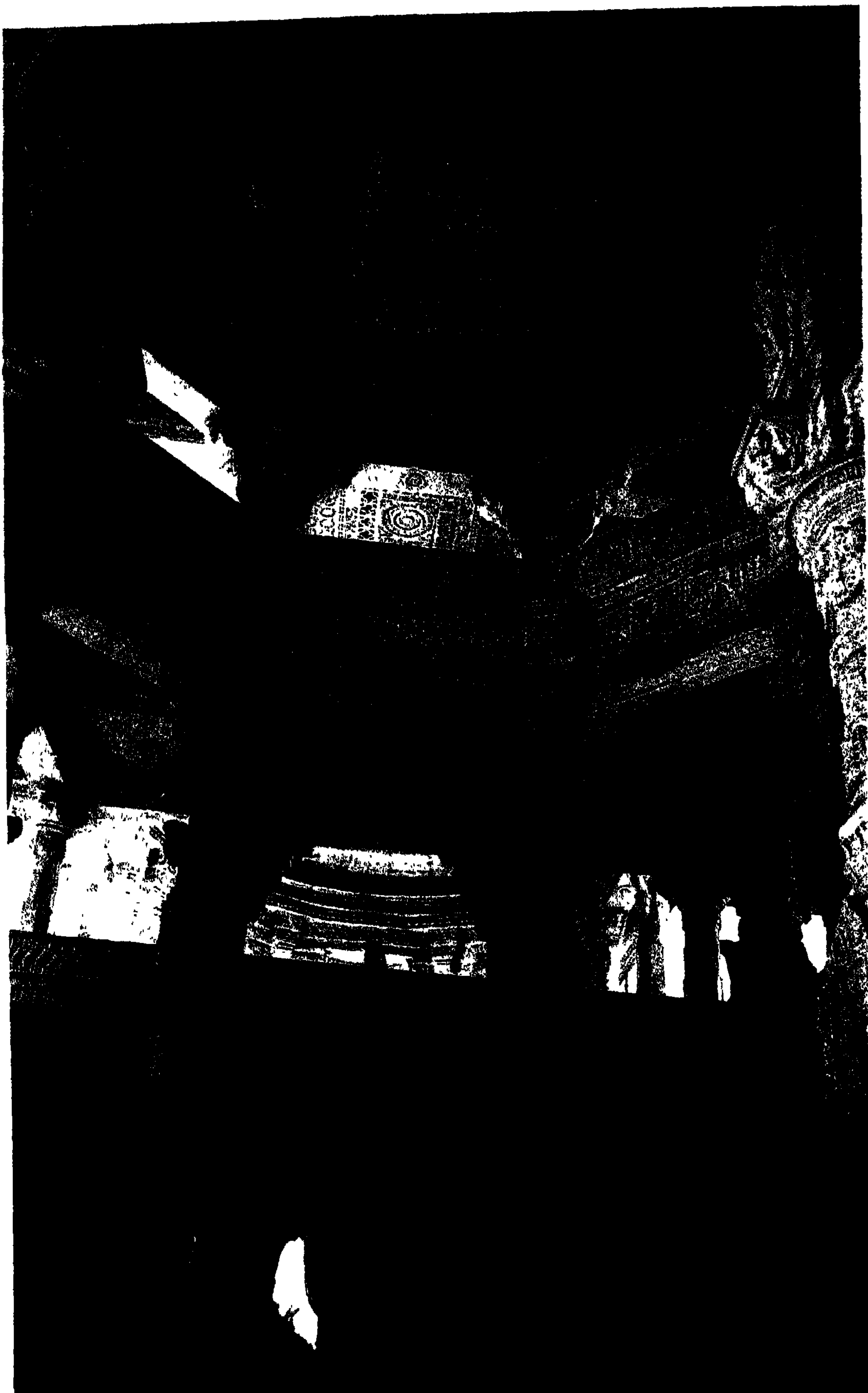
JAIN TEMPLE AT RANAKPUR

A MAIN SHRINE
B SECONDARY FOUR SHRINES
C LATERAL SHRINES
D SMALL SUBSIDARY SHRINES



PLAN OF TEMPLE OF TEJPALA AND VASTUPALA

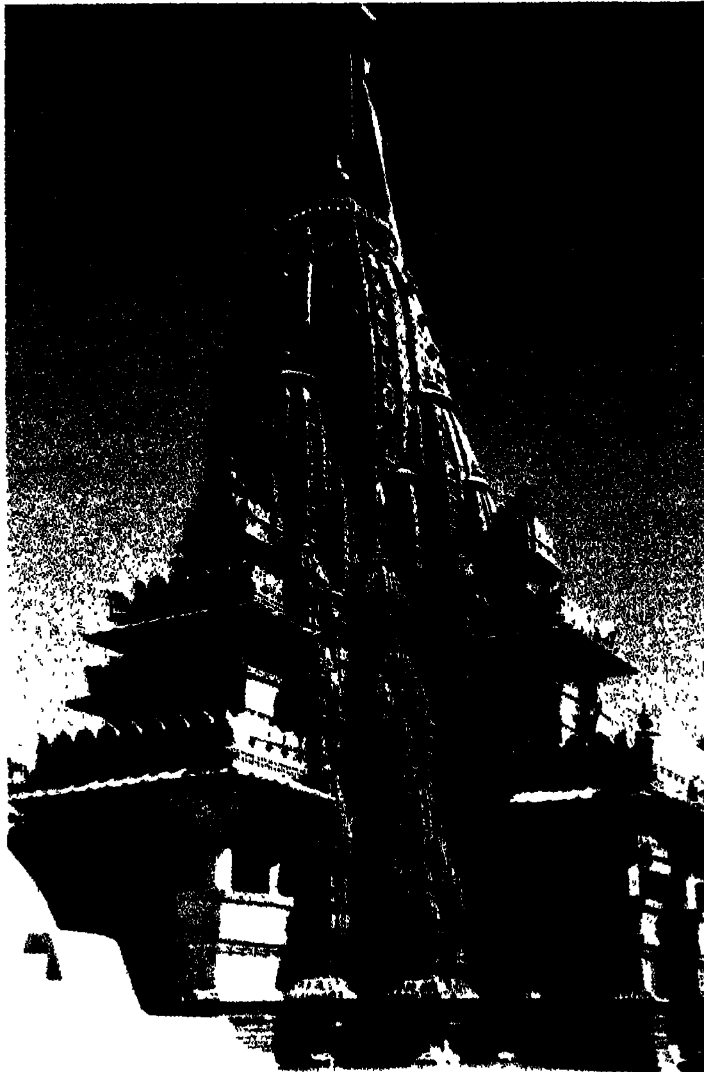




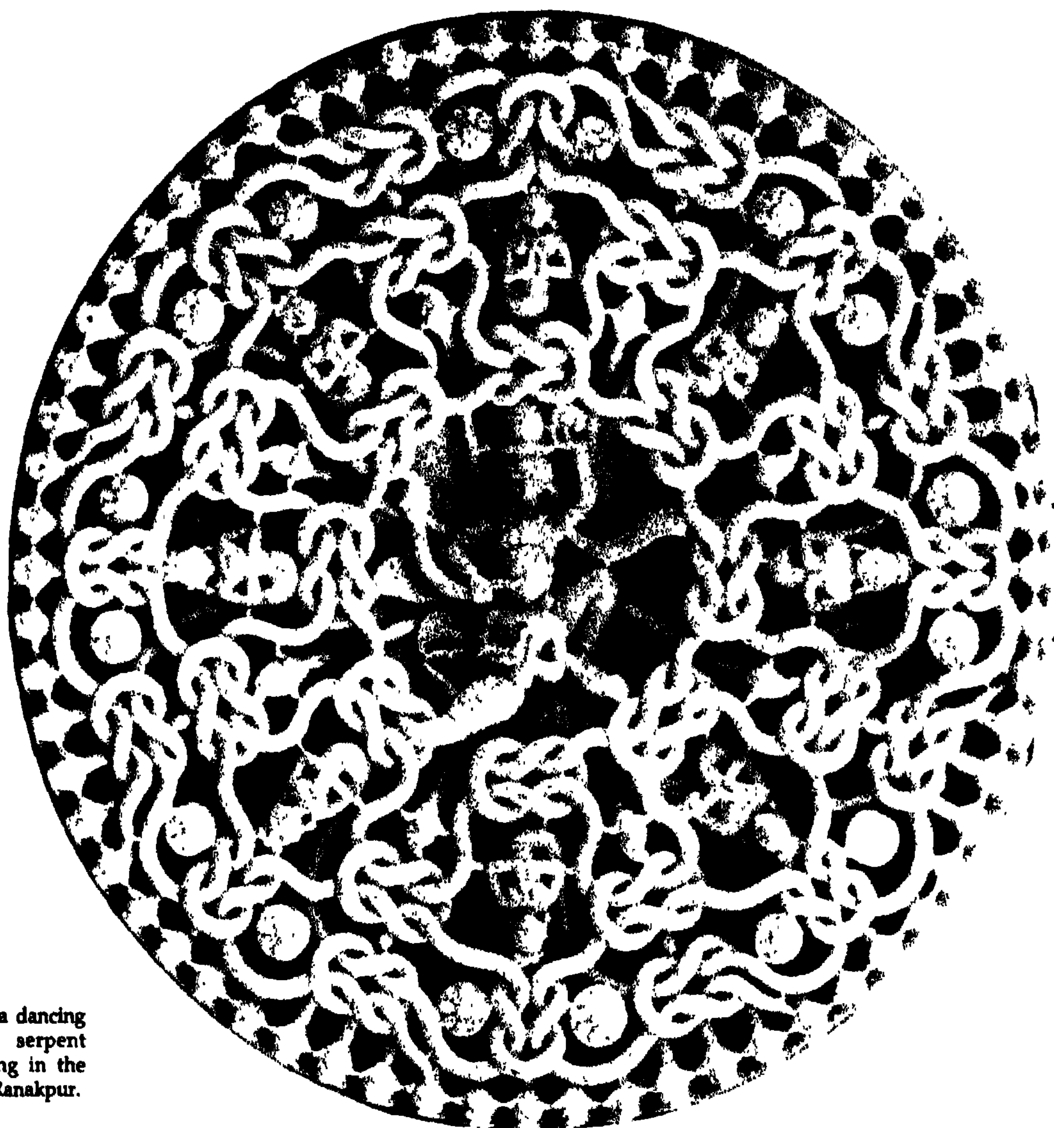
Dome of the *rangamandapa* in the north hall in the Ādiśvara temple, Ranakpur.

The plan for the *caumukha* temple, though complex, is not cumbersome. When seen from the centre, from the square sanctum with a quadruple image of the deity, a geometrical elegance is evident. Since the temple is built on westerly hill-slope, along its western facade, the *jagatī* or the *adhiṣṭhāna* had to be made very high. On top and at the centre of the platform, which is terraced inside, the *garbhagṛha* — square sanctum — is located with its four openings, each through one of the four walls. Each of these openings of the sanctum leads to a *raṅgamaṇḍapa* — the dancing hall, which, in turn, is connected with a two-storeyed *maṇḍapa*, and across this *maṇḍapa* to an impressive portal, also double-storeyed, called *balāṇa* or *nalimaṇḍapa* as it covers the stairway.

The wall that surrounds the rectangular courtyard covering an area of 60 x 62 m, exclusive of the projections of each side, appears to be the main feature of the exterior, for it forms the chief elevational aspect from the outside. Along this boundary wall, facing the inner rectangle, is a long row of eighty-six *devakulikās*; they serve as chapels for minor deities. From the outside, above the outwork of the elevated wall, one sees an array of small tur-

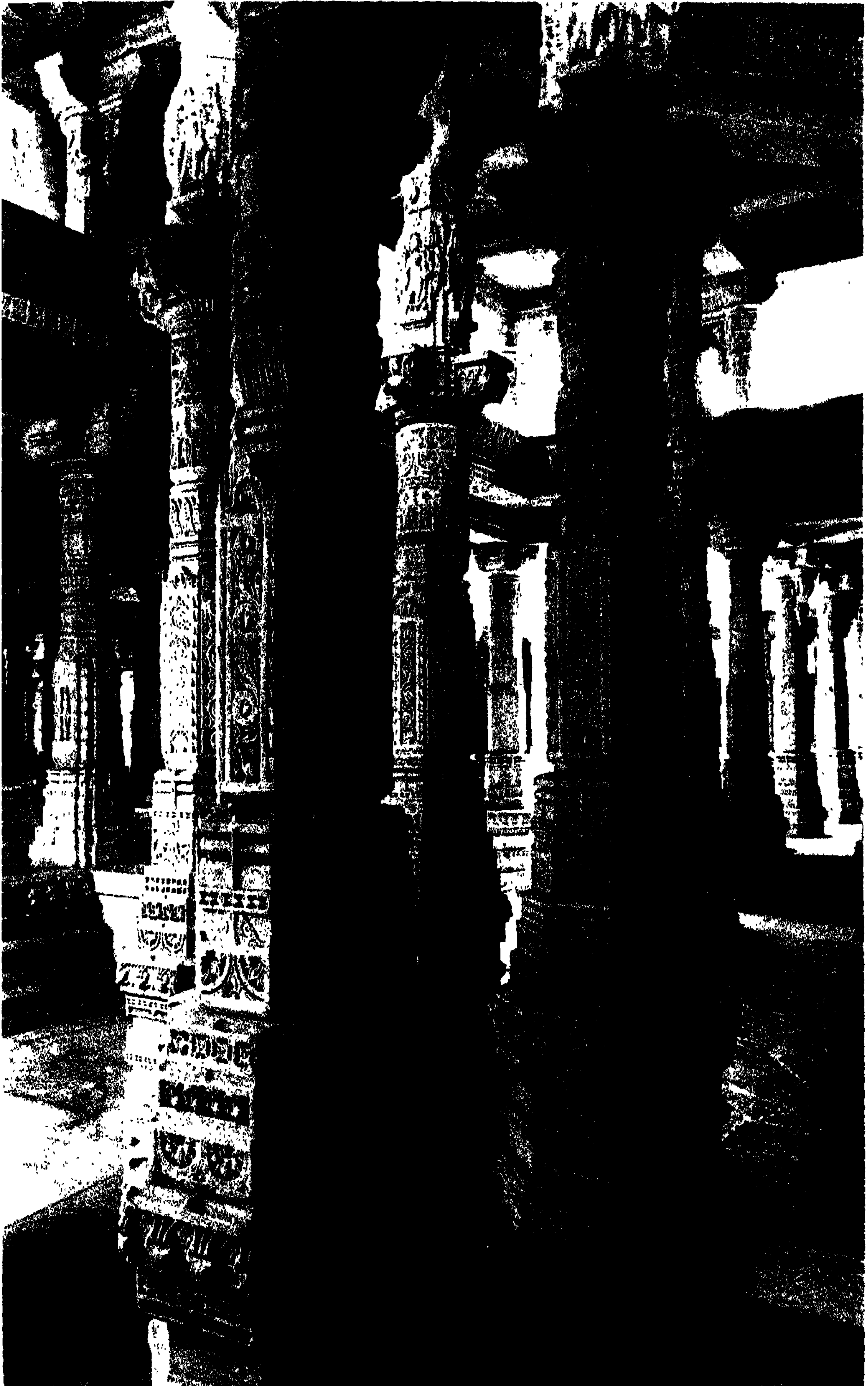


The Ādīśvara temple, Ranakpur.



Kāliyadaman: Kṛṣṇa dancing on the head of serpent Kāliya, on a ceiling in the Ādīśvara temple, Ranakpur.

rets surmounting these chapels. Beyond them are the five *śikharas*, of which the largest and the most prominent tops the central sanctuary. Four others surround a corner-shrine each, and twenty cupolas each provide a roof over a pillared hall. Access to the enclosed rectangle is made through any of the double-storeyed portals of great elegance in the middle of three walls. Of these portals the largest one is on the west, establishing it clearly as the main entrance. Each of these entrances leads through a series of columned courts and pillared halls, and to the central square sanctum. The sanctum occupies the middle of the complex composition on a raised rectangular court, measuring 29.0 x 30.5 m, with four pillared halls on all four sides. The interior of the shrines shows a cruciform chamber with *caumukha* marble image.



Pillars in the Ādīśvara temple, Ranakpur, no two of which are alike

The grand Ādīśvara temple at Ranakpur arouses many responses: of awe, of complexity, of grandeur. In this temple there are many carvings and sculptural pieces, created with overwhelming skill and artistry. But it is the totality of the vision that inspires one. In his *History of Indian and Eastern Architecture,* James Fergusson observes: "The immense number of parts in the building, and their general smallness, prevents it from laying claim to anything like architectural grandeur, but their variety, their beauty of detail — no two pillars in the whole building being exactly alike — the grace with which they are arranged, the tasteful admixture of domes of different heights with flat ceilings and the mode in which the light is introduced, combine to produce an excellent effect. Indeed, I know of no other building in India of the same class, that leaves so pleasing an impression, or affords so many hints for the graceful arrangement of columns in an interior."[2]

The *caumukha* design at Ranakpur left a great impact on temple architecture in Rajasthan and Gujarat for many decades and centuries that followed. At Mount Abu, amongst the Dilwara group of temples, in 1459 A.D. a *caumukha* dedicated to *tīrthaṅkara* Pārśvanātha was created. Another *caumukha* temple was constructed in 1681 within the Karalavaski-Tuk of the great temple-city on the Satrunjaya mountain near Palitana.

Notes

1. For a comprehensive description of the temple, see Ghosh, A. Ed. *Jaina Art and Architecture,* pp. 357-65.
2. p. 137.

Chapter VI

Feminine Mystique

Goddesses in Jain Temples

सिंहारूढाऽम्बिका पीता मलुंबि नागपाशकम् ।
अङ्कुशञ्च तथा पुत्रं तथा हस्तेष्वनुक्रमात् ।।

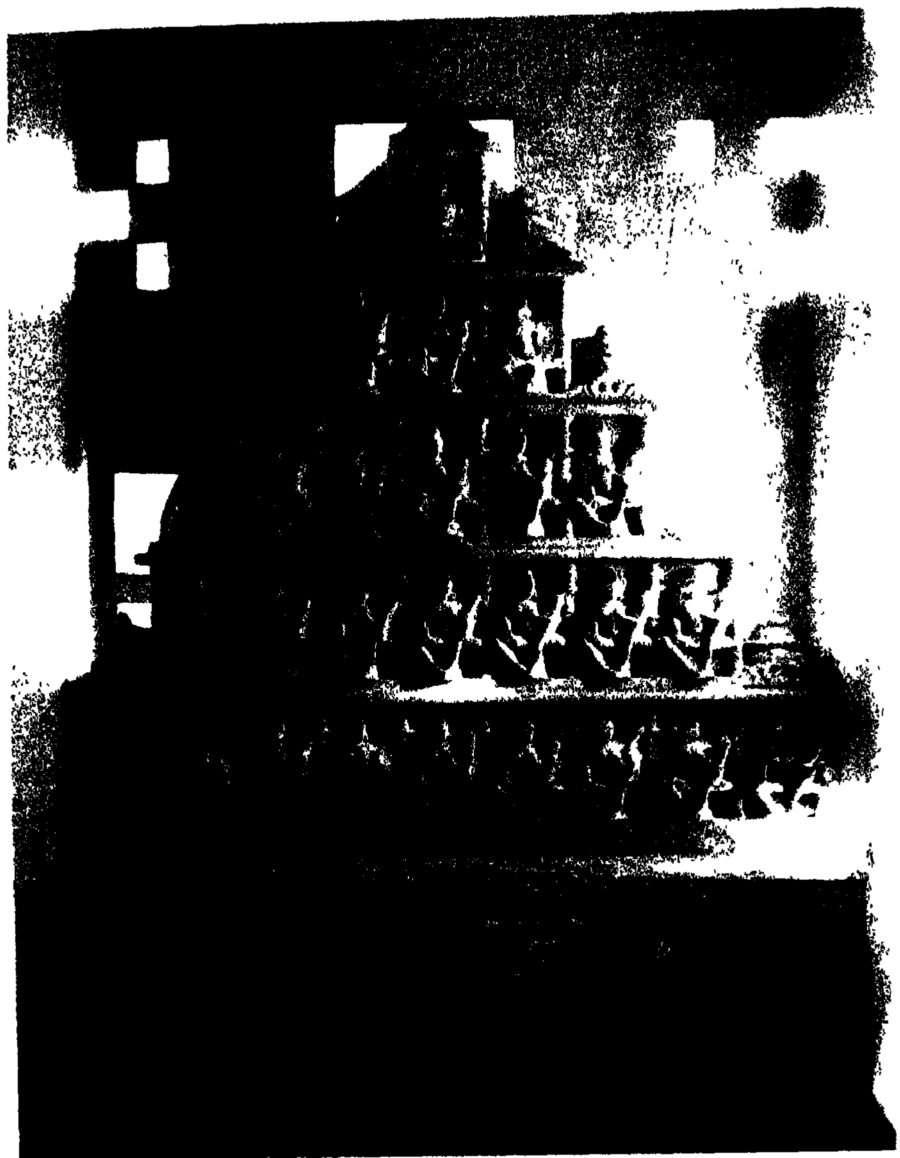
Yellow of colour, Ambikā rides a lion.
She holds a bunch of mangoes, a goad,
a serpent-noose and a child.
—*Rūpamaṇḍana* Vi, 19

The eleventh century Vimalavasāhi temple is dedicated to *tīrthaṅkara* Neminātha. But Neminātha's presence here, as of *tīrthaṅkaras* in other Jain temples, is very subdued. Instead, it is his 'nature-spirit' *yakṣī* Ambikā, known as 'little mother' in many parts of India, who fills this temple with the mystique of the feminine.

A magnificent sculpture depicting Ambikā in all her splendour forms one of the four basal corners in the *raṅgamaṇḍapa* of this temple. Seated in *lalitāsana* on her lion mount, the four-armed goddess holds bunches of mangoes, shooting forth like stems of lotus, in her three hands and a child in the fourth. *Caurī*-bearers stand on her either side. There is an exquisite sense of contentment on her face, making it certainly amongst the most beautiful images of Ambikā anywhere in India.

In the marble beam defining the basal corner is carved a *kalpalatā*, 'a creeper fulfilling all wishes'. Ambikā, symbolically, is also *kalpalatā* and *kāmanā devī*, 'a goddess that fulfils all wishes'.

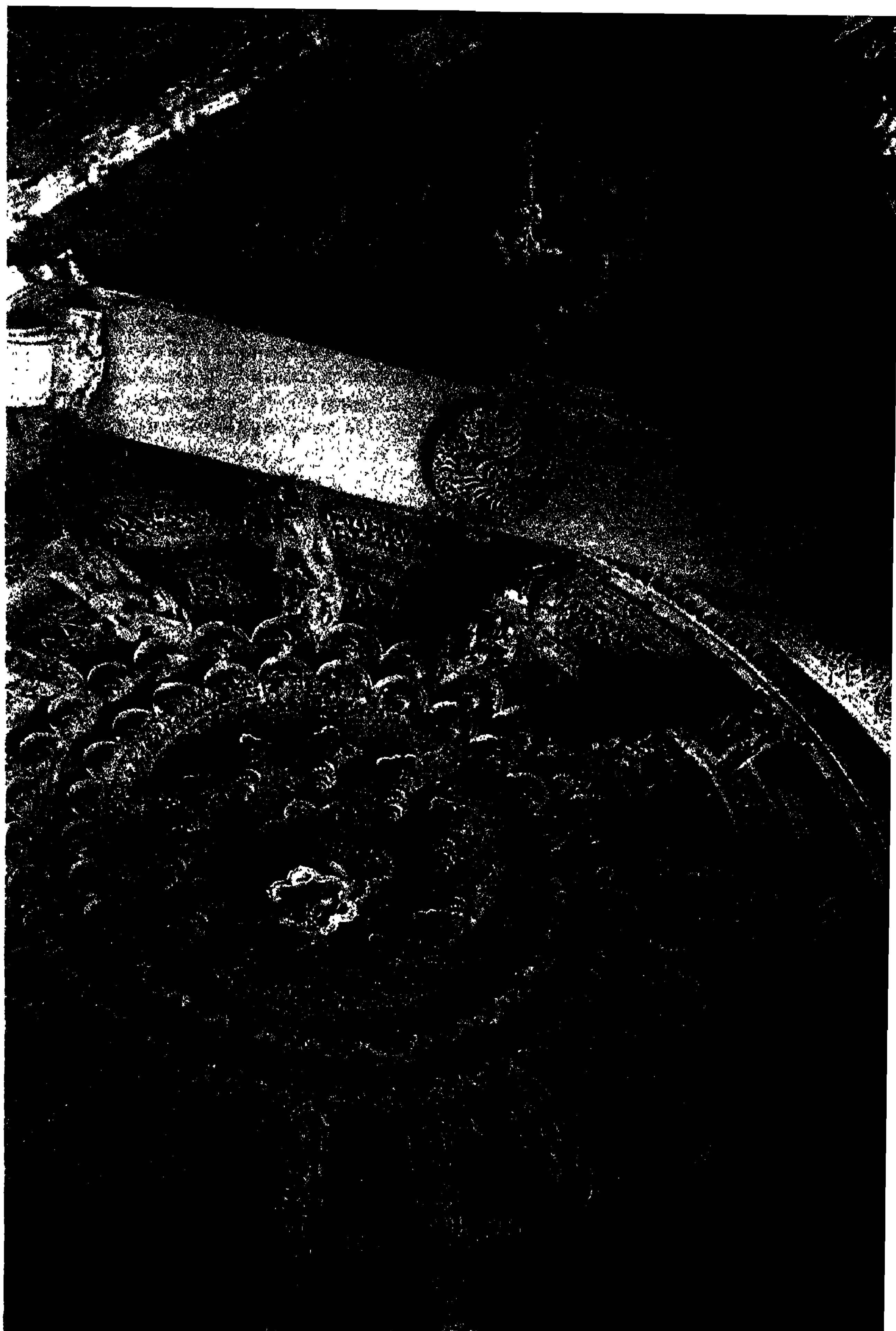
The temple of Vimalavasāhi, though dedicated to Neminātha, is in fact a celebration of the fecundity of Ambikā; she represents the power of birth and rebirth, of generation and regeneration, at all levels of life, spiritual and physical alike. Her sensuous and contented presence in this temple, as also of goddesses Cakreśvarī, Lakṣmī, Sarasvatī, the sixteen *vidyādevīs*, 'goddesses of knowledge' and scores of sensuous dancers, fills the temple with a certain heavenly fragrance.



A *pattā* with an image of *jina* and twenty-four images of a woman with a child, possibly Ambikā, or mothers of the 24 *tīrthankaras*, the Ādīśvara temple, Ranakpur.



Close-up of col. picture on page 109.



Basal corner in the *rangamaṇḍapa* in the Vimalavasāhi temple, figure of Ambikā, seated in *lalitāsana* on her lion mount. The four-armed goddess holds bunches of mango tree in her three hands and a child in the fourth. On the marble beam delineating the corner is carved a *kalpavallī*, 'a creeper that fulfils all wishes'.

In numerous ways, this fragrance and mystique of the feminine permeates all temples in India. "The most magnificent temple and the most inconspicuous village shrine", writes Maury, "do not differ on their emphasis of the Feminine, but merely in the numerical and artistic elaboration of its depictions. The same intensity that has molded the otherworldly mood and suggestion of the celebrated sanctuaries of Khajuraho, Konark and Bhubaneshwar equally dominate their less familiar counterparts everywhere. Whether as a companion of a canonical deity, or as a member of a merrymaking group of supernaturals; whether as a lonely dancer or a musician disclosing her charms, or as the gracefully sinuous guardian of the gate; whether voluptuously enlivening a pillar, or upholding its capital; whether enchanting the beholder from rows of recessed niches along a temple's circumference, or from circles of high reliefs surrounding its lofty cupola, the countenance of the earlier *yakṣī* wields her inescapable magic. The individual figure may be called surāsundari or apsarā, devikā or mohini, yogini or nāyikā, it is always an embodiment of the Feminine, in its sensuous loveliness perpetuating the immemorial nature of the lotus goddess, giving contour to the physical fertility and psychic desire that are the promise of eternal regeneration."[1]

The Indian temple — Jain, Buddhist or Hindu — is a synthesis of many symbols. "By their superposition, repetition, proliferation and amalgamation," writes Kramrisch, "its total meaning is formed ever anew....The vivifying Germ (*garbha*) and the Embryo of splendour (*Hiraṇyagarbha*) are within the walls of the *Garbhagṛha* and have their images in the construction of the temple."[2]

In the elaborate architecture of the Indian temple, all other buildings within the sacred precinct are accessory and subservient to the *garbhagṛha*, the womb. This is the sanctum sanctorum; this is where the presiding deity of the temple resides. Symbolically, this is the centre of creation and of birth; this is where the sacred 'seed' dwells; this is where the fruition takes place.

The seed, *bindu*, according to Tantrism, is "an unlimited entity, the productive point of potentiality....the empirical substance that can transform a man into godlike being."[3] The image of *bindu* is central to the Indian spiritual thought as it is to many others.[4] Again and again, in art, myth and iconography, this thought finds an exquisite expression: In an eighteenth century painting of Guler school, Viṣṇu lies on the coils of a thousand-hooded serpent inside the Golden Egg, floating in the Cosmic Ocean. In another painting of the same period, two Manipuri dancers dance within an egg creating the dance of life. *Hiraṇyagarbha* — 'Embryo of Splendour' — is portrayed as an egg encompassing the universe. In the Elephanta Caves, *Ardha- nārīśvara* — Śiva as half-man, half-woman — dances the Cosmic dance celebrating the words of Lao-Tzu:

One who has
man's wings
And a woman's also
Is himself a womb
of the world
Continuously, endlessly
giving birth.[5]
—*Lao Tzu*

Almost all aspects of Jain iconography, art and ritual, in one way or another, are connected with *pañca mahā kalyāṇaka*, 'five great events', in the life of every *tīrthaṅkara*.

Of these, the first is *garbha kalyāṇaka*, 'the event of the embryo'. In case of the twenty-fourth *tīrthaṅkara* Mahāvīra, it relates to the transfer of Mahāvīra as embryo from the womb of Brahmāṇī Sunandā to a more propitious womb, that of Kṣatriyāṇi Triśalā of the royal family. This was accomplished by Naigameṣin, an attendant of Indra; he is a goat-headed, pot-bellied deity, and has a special place in the Śvetāmbara tradition of Jainism.

According to the Jain legend, Śakra himself brought the infant *tīrthaṅkara* to the top of Mount Meru, the mountain of gods, for the divine bath. Joining a host of nymphs, the 'Lord of Celestials' rejoiced and danced Indra and Ajātaśatru, a great ruler on earth and a contemporary of Mahāvīra, waved the *caurī* before the *tīrthaṅkara*.

The legend of the transfer of the embryo by Naigameṣin is narrated in the context of Mahāvīra. However, it is associated with all other *tīrthaṅkaras* as well. In turn, this great event, 'the event of the embryo', is ritualistically reenacted on special occasions in the Śvetāmbara temples, and is a subject of many paintings.

The importance of birth as an act of new creation, and notion of abundance, wish-fulfilment and fecundity are basic to the Indian concept of a goddess, whether Hindu, Buddhist or Jain, and "accounts for much of the voluptuousness of the female form, both divine and human, in Indian sculpture."[6]

The 'little mother'. Ambikā is the most popular of the Jain *yakṣīs;* like the Hindu goddess Durgā, she rides a lion, and is often compared to her. According to a Śvetāmbara legend, Ambikā was thrown out of her house by her husband for bringing dishonour to the family by offering to a Jain monk the food cooked for Brahmans. Dejected, she went into a forest and sat under a mango tree with her two sons. The power of her virtue, however, transformed the tree into a *kalpavṛkṣa*, 'a wishing tree', giving her and the children all they wished for. A dry tank nearby always overflowed with water whenever she went near it.



Exchange of embryos; Queen Triśalā recounting the auspicious dreams to the king; Kalpasūtra; paper; ca. 1439 A.D., Marwar.

Courtesy: National Museum, New Delhi.

Angered at the treatment of Ambikā by her husband, the gods burned to the ground the village where she had lived; the only house that remained unaffected was her own. So the word spread that it was the wife's saintliness that had saved the building. The Brahmans now begged for the same food which they had earlier spurned as impure, and her husband felt sad and remorseful.

The husband decided then to look for his wife and ask for her forgiveness. However, when the repenting husband approached her, fearing that he meant more harm, she jumped into a well with her sons. They all died. Later she was reborn as a goddess, a *yakṣī* of *tīrthaṅkara* Neminātha. Her husband was born as a lion, whom she rode as her mount. The two sons were initiated by Neminātha.

In Jain iconography, Ambikā is often shown with four arms standing or seated under a mango tree, or with a bunch of mangoes hanging over her. She holds a child in her lap, and a lion sits at her feet.

Worship of Ambikā is very old, and images and temples of Ambikā have been consecrated at many places in India. There is also a large number of Ambikā images in various museums in the country.



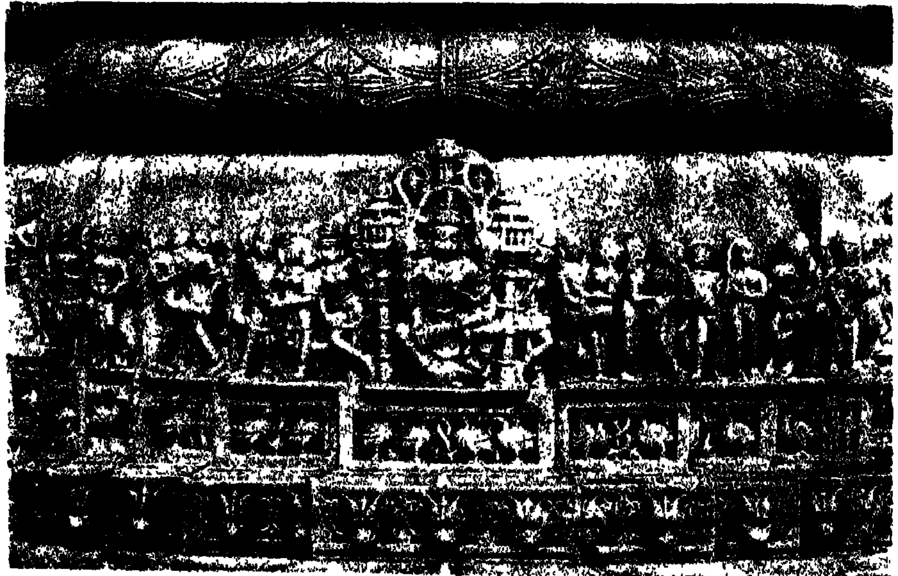
Ambikā, with a child in her lap and a bough of mangoes, 12th century, Belur.

One of the finest and most complex images of Ambikā is a tenth century relief, now in the museum at Mathura. The goddess sits in *ardhaparyaṇkā* posture, holding one child on her lap and another standing near her. She is flanked on either side by a *camaradhara*, Gaṇeśa and Kubera. On the sides of the *tīrthaṅkara* Neminātha are Kṛṣṇa as Viṣṇu and Balarāma; according to the Jain tradition, all three — Kṛṣṇa, Balarāma and Neminātha — belonged to the same family. The upper part also shows four more divine figures in flying-postures. At the bottom are eight female devotees. This relief is an important icon showing a fusion of Jain and Hindu concepts.

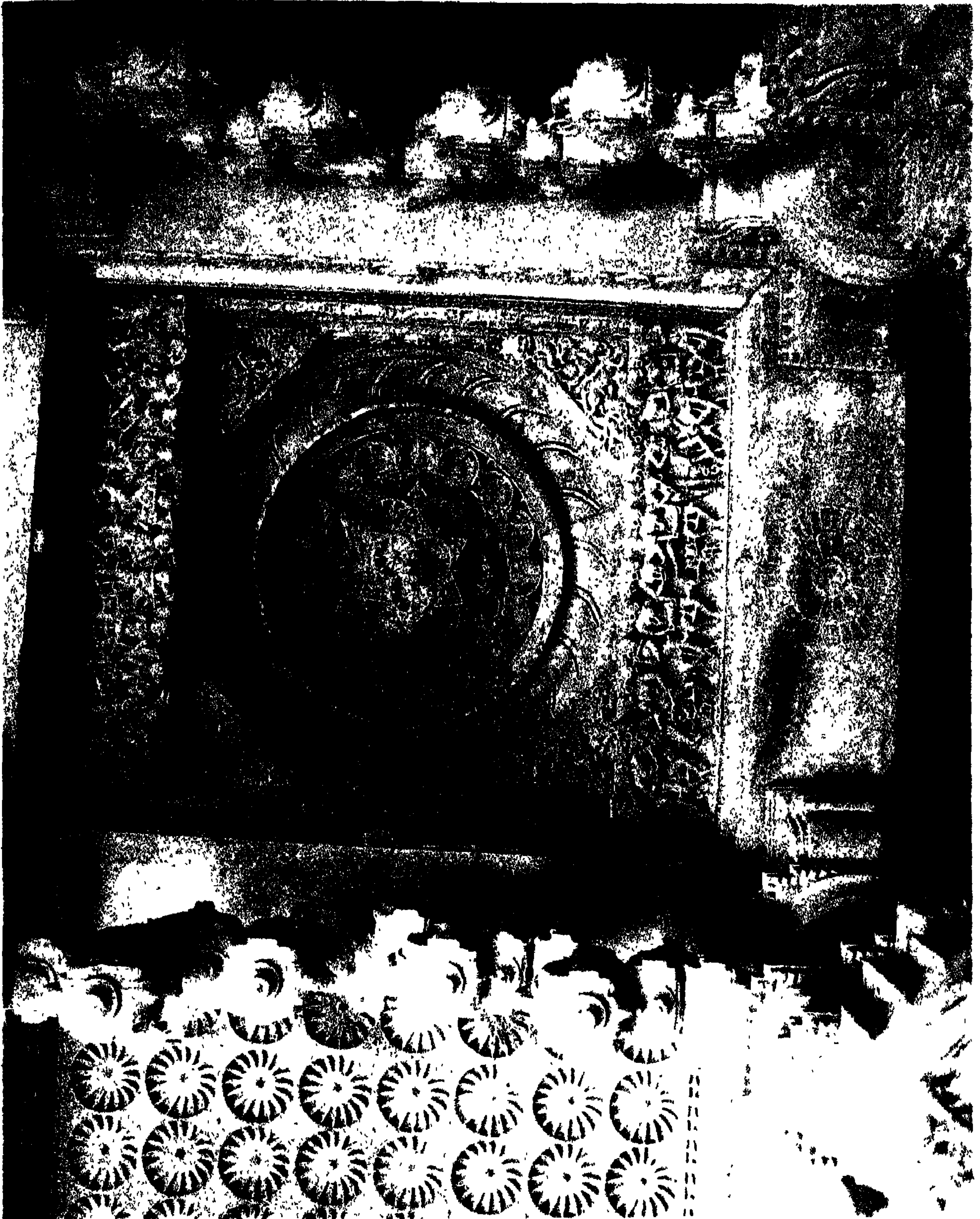
In the Jain caves at Ellora, in the Indra Sabha complex, there is a beautiful image of Ambikā; this has been described by one critic as "the loveliest woman in Ellora....indeed, her coquetry, pride of beauty and elegance have few equals in Indian art."[7]

Ambikā is also depicted in Lunavasāhi on the ceilings in the north and the south bays. She is flanked on each side by dancers and a female *caurī*-bearer. The six-armed goddess is seated in *lalitāsana* on her lion mount. She carries *āmralumbi* in her five arms, while in her sixth arm she holds a child.

There is an image of two-armed *yakṣī* Ambikā on a corridor ceiling in the Lunavasāhi temple. She sits in *lalitāsana* on her lion mount. She carries *āmralumbi* in one hand and holds a child in her lap with the other. On either side of her is represented a tree motif below which stand an *ārādhaka*, 'a devotee', with folded hands.



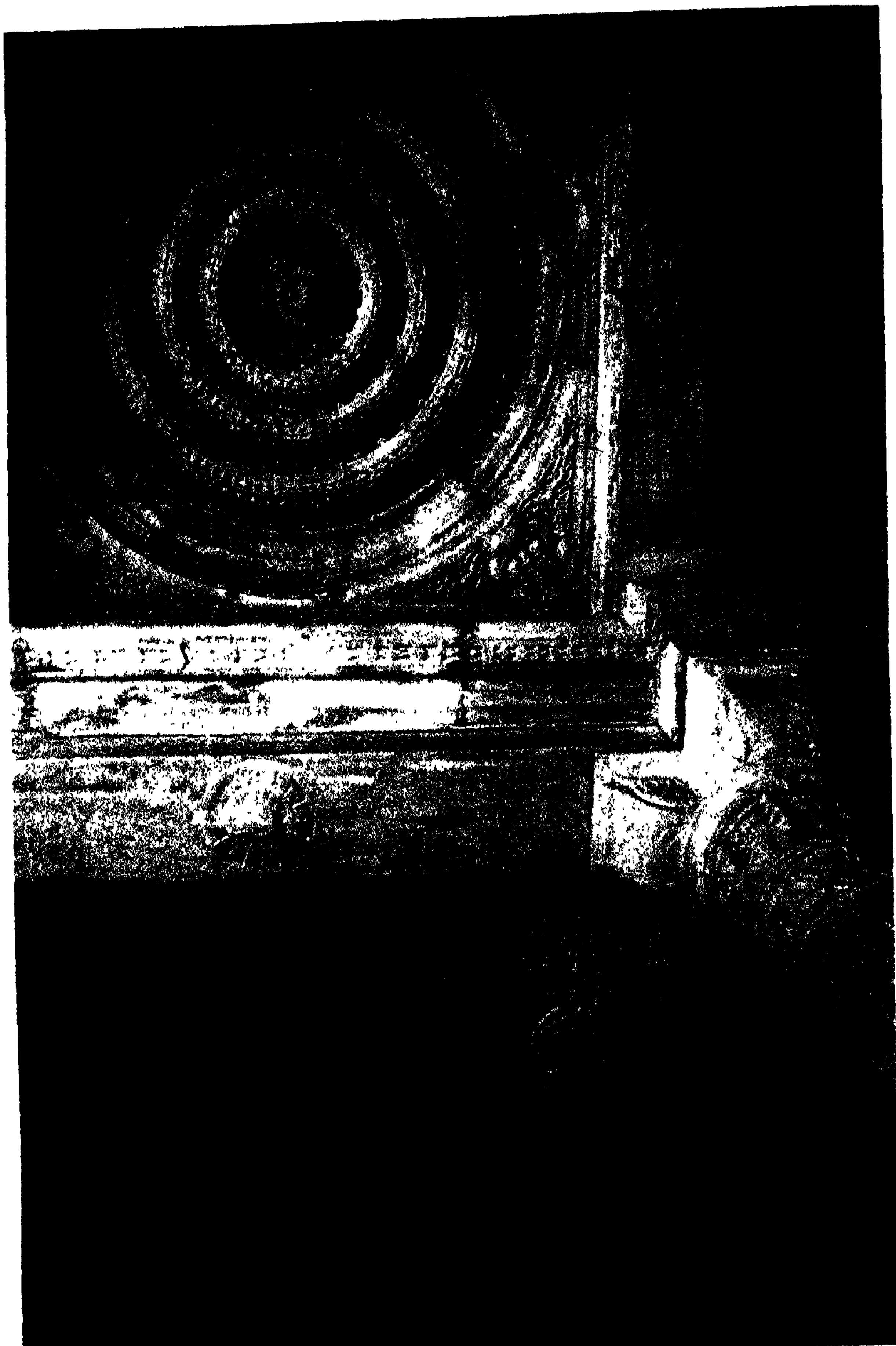
Ambikā, dancers and lovers in *mithuna*, with *tīrthaṅkara* Neminātha in *dhyānamudrā* in the Pārśvanātha temple, Ranakpur.



A panel with dancers as part of a domical ceiling depicting a lotus, in the south bay in the Lunavasāhi temple.







Goddess Acchuptā seated in *lalitāsana* on her horse mount, on a corridor ceiling in the Vimalavasāhi temple. The sixteen-armed goddess is accompanied on each side by a *caurī*-bearer. Above her are hovering *vidyādharas* showering *abhiṣeka* water on the goddess or playing music. Below is seen a band of lotus scrolls that issue from the mouth of a *kīrttimukha* carved in the centre.

Sarasvatī
Goddess of Arts and Culture

Sarasvatī is white-complexioned, clad in white garments,
and rides a swan mount. Adorned with a halo she sits on
a white lion-throne. She has four arms: the two left hands
hold a white lotus and a *vīṇā*, lute, and
the two right hands a book and a rosary.
—*Ācarādinakara*[8]

In a bay of north portico adjoining the *raṅgamaṇḍapa* in the Vimalavasāhi temple, there is an image of four-armed goddess Sarasvatī in *lalitāsana*. On her either side, with folded hands stand two bearded men, one architect Loyana and the other sculptor Kela, with a measuring rod. In her hands, the goddess holds a lotus, a book, *varadākṣa* and a pitcher; her mount swan is shown below the pitcher. Sutradhara Loyana is believed to be the chief architect of the *raṅgamaṇḍapa,* and Kela its chief sculptor. On top of the panel are two hovering *vidyādharas,* 'carriers of knowledge', with garlands. It is befitting that both the architect and the sculptor pay homage to Sarasvatī, the goddess of learning and the arts, for all over India she is greatly venerated by the Hindus, the Buddhists and the Jains alike.

As the source of inspiration for all artistic and creative excellence, Sarasvatī is manifest wherever human culture and civilisation blossom, inspiring and embodying human creativity in all its rich diversity.

In the Hindu mythologies, Sarasvatī is sometimes associated with Brahmā both as his daughter and as his wife, and at other times with Viṣṇu as Puṣṭi, one of his consorts.

Sarasvatī is known by many names: *Jagatmātā*, 'mother of the world'; *Śaktirupinī*, 'whose form is power or *śakti'*; *Viśvarūpa,* 'containing all forms within her'. Sarasvatī's character as the inspiration and embodiment of culture endows her with such cosmic characteristics "As the reality....that permits or inspires the beauty and grace manifest in the arts, that has enabled human beings to achieve an almost godlike nature in the physical world as its masters and moulders, the goddess of culture comes to be extolled or equated with the highest powers of the cosmos."[9]

On pages 116-117
Sixteen-armed goddess Sarasvatī seated in *lalitāsana* on a corridor ceiling in the Vimalavasāhi temple. She holds, amongst other things, a lotus, a conch, *vīṇā, varadamudrā, abhayamudrā,* book and a pitcher. To her right is a six-armed male dancer and on her left a six-armed drummer. Below is a band depicting a goat, a boar, etc. On the top there is a sculptural panel depicting Gaja-Lakṣmī in the centre and four male divinities in niches on her each side.

The Jains have given a special place to Sarasvatī in their pantheon as head of the Śruta-devatās and the Vidyādevīs, and she is known to them by many names: *Śrutadevī, Śāradā, Vāgīśvarī.* As Śrutadevī she presides over the *śruta*, the preaching of the *tīrthaṅkaras.*

Sarasvatī is depicted in Jain art — miniature paintings, bronze and stone images — with two, four or eight arms. In Śvetāmbara images, as in her other depictions, she rides a swan; in Digāmbara art and icons, she rides a peacock. Her traditional attributes are the lotus, the *vīṇā*, the book, and the rosary. These are sometimes replaced by a *kamaṇḍū*. 'water pot', the *varada*, or *abhayamudrā*, or the noose. In some images of Sarasvatī, a miniature *jina* figure appears over her head distinguishing them from her Hindu images.

Purity and transcendence are the most predominant attributes associated with Sarasvatī. She is believed to be pure white like the snow, the moon or the *kunda* flower, shining brilliantly like a thousand moons. This is also expressed in her mount, the swan; all spiritual masters who have transcended the delusions of the phenomenal world are called *paramahaṁsa*, 'sublime swan'. "Her realm is one of beauty, perfection and grace; it is a realm created by artistic inspiration, philosophic insight, and accumulated knowledge, which has enabled human beings to so refine their natural world that they have been able to transcend its limitations. Sarasvatī astride her swan beckons human beings to continued cultural creations and civilized perfection."[10]

The Jains and Hindus celebrate festivals honouring Sarasvatī especially at *jñāna pañcami* in the month of *kārtika*, and on *śruta pañcami* in the month of *jyeṣṭha*. Special hymns are sung in her honour, and all instruments of creation — of music, writing, painting — and books and gurus are especially worshipped on these occasions.

In a corridor ceiling in the Vimalavasāhi temple, there is an image of sixteen-armed goddess Sarasvatī sitting in *lalitāsana*.

She holds a lotus, a *daṇḍa*, a noose, a conch, *vīṇā*, *varadamudrā*, *abhayamudrā* and a lotus in the right set of hands, and a lotus, *vīṇā*, another musical instrument, a goad, a fruit, *abhayamudrā* with *akṣamālā*, a book and a pitcher in the left set of hands. On either side of the figure are a six-armed dancer and a drummer. Below the image is a figural band depicting a goat, a boar, etc. Above the image is a sculptural panel depicting Gaja-Lakṣmī in the centre and four divinities on her both sides.



Goddess Sarasvatī, 16th century, Rumtek monastery, Sikkim. Here Sarasvatī is sitting on a lotus, and is also holding a lotus in her left hand.

In a corridor ceiling in Lunavasāhi, there is another image of Sarasvatī. Here the six-armed goddess holds a lotus, a cymbal and *varadākṣa* in the right hands, and *vīṇā*, a cymbal and a book in the left hands. Her prominent symbol of cognizance, swan, is shown below her right folded leg.

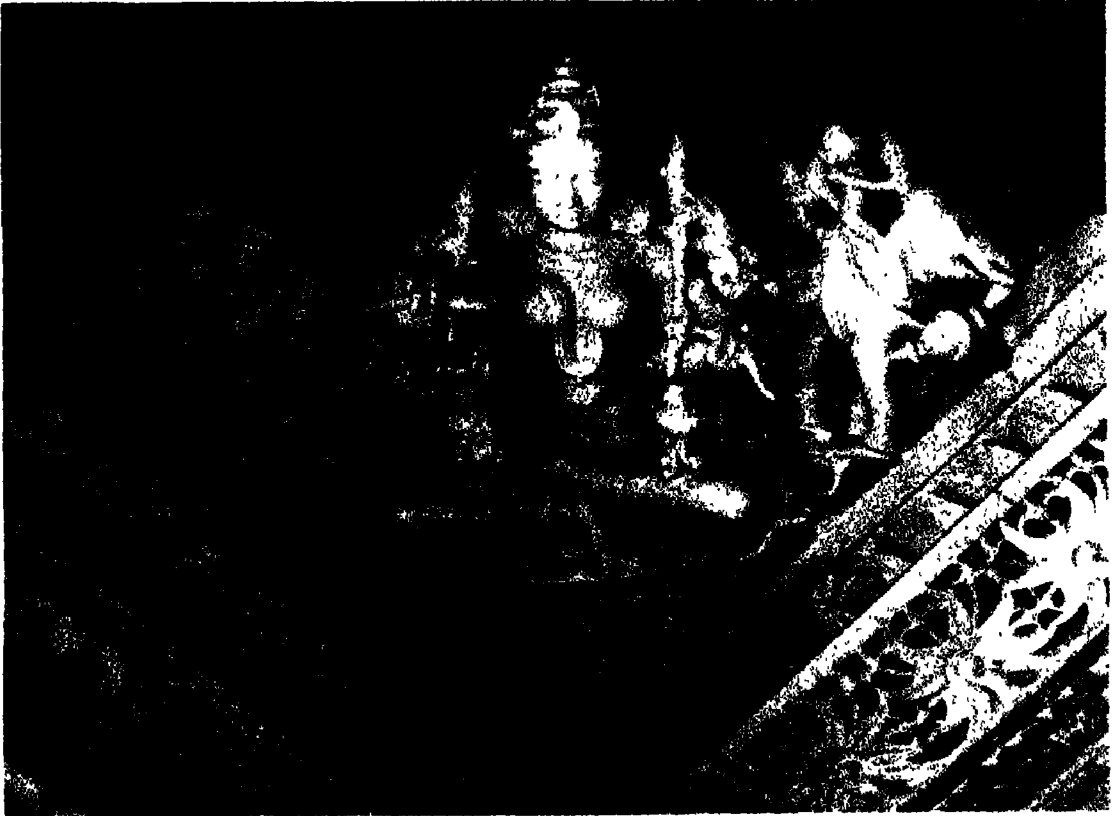


Laksmi on a south portico ceiling in the Vimalavasāhi temple. The ceiling is shallow domical consisting of four circular courses The fourth course is flat and has a graceful image of four-armed Gaja-Lakṣmī, seated in *padmāsana* on a pedestal supported by stemmed lotus and water vases. In upper hands, she holds lotus plants, with elephants engraved in them, her lower hands are in *dhyānamudrā*. Two *caurī*-bearers stand on her either side, and two *vidyādharas* hover in the upper section with garlands (Detail: Lakṣmī of picture on page 40).

Śrī Lakṣmī
Goddess of Fecundity

Then she (Triśalā, mother of the *tīrthaṅkara*)
...saw the goddess of famous beauty, Śrī, on the
top of Mount Himāvat, reposing on a lotus in
the Lotus Lake, anointed with the water from
the large and powerful trunks of
the guardian elephants.
—*Kalpasūtra*[11]

Lakṣmī, the goddess of prosperity and beauty, is a popular figure amongst the Hindus and the Jains alike. She is known by many names: Padmā, Kamalā, Indirā —'the lotus one', and Śrī — 'the beautiful one'. In the Vedas, the goddess Lakṣmī is praised as *padma sambhava* — 'lotus born', *padmākṣī* — 'lotus



Detail: Lakṣmī in the southwest bay in the *navacaukī* in the Lunavasāhi temple.

eyed', *padma-mālinī* — 'adorned with lotus garlands', *padma priya* — 'to whom the lotus is dear'. She has even been called as 'the one who reveals the nature of the lotus'.

Lakṣmī, 'the lotus goddess', is the embodiment of beauty and splendour, of dignity and glory, of good fortune and wealth, of graciousness and prosperity. She is certainly the most popular and venerated deities in India. Her auspicious nature and her reputation as representing *Kāmanā devī*, 'the goddess that fulfils all wishes', attracts devotees everywhere. "All of India's back country is the dominion of Lakṣmī, the goddess of the lotus...She accompanies every mile travelled through central India, every visit to a temple...Her likenesses are omnipresent on the walls and pillars, lintels and niches of sanctuaries, regardless of the deity of their specific dedication."[12]

In Kalpasūtra, cited above, there is a reference to her appearing to the mother of *tīrthaṅkara* Mahāvīra in an auspicious dream, foretelling her about his birth.

In Jain and Hindu art and icons, Lakṣmī (or Śrī) appears generally with four hands; she holds lotuses in two hands, and in other two, she has either a *kalaśa* (vase) or a citron, or they are shown in *varada* or *abhayamudrā* or resting in the lap, with palms crossed, in the posture of meditation.

Gaja-Lakṣmī — 'Lakṣmī with the elephants showering her with rain' — has its association with Indra riding an elephant and bringing down the rain to fertilise the earth.

The goddess Lakṣmī is also depicted in a similar form among the dream symbols in the centre of the door lintels of temples and domestic shrines.

In a bay ceiling in south portico adjoining the *raṅgamaṇḍapa* in the Vimalavasāhi temple, the four-armed goddess Gaja-Lakṣmī is seated in *padmāsana* on a pedestal supported by stemmed lotus and water vases. She holds lotus plants with elephants in the upper hands; her lower hands are in *dhyānamudrā*. On top of the panel are two hovering *vidyādharas* bearing garlands.

On the gateways at Sāñchī, Lakṣmī is depicted at several places. At one place she is shown standing on a full-blossomed lotus with folded hands, while two elephants, standing on the lotuses springing from the same spray, shower water over her from upturned jars held in their trunks.

On the middle section of the front architrave of the southern gateway at Sanchi, 1st century B.C., Lakṣmī stands on a fully blossomed lotus in her right hand, being anointed by two elephants, standing on two lotuses.

On page 125
Dancers and musicians, the Pārśvanātha temple, Ranakpur.



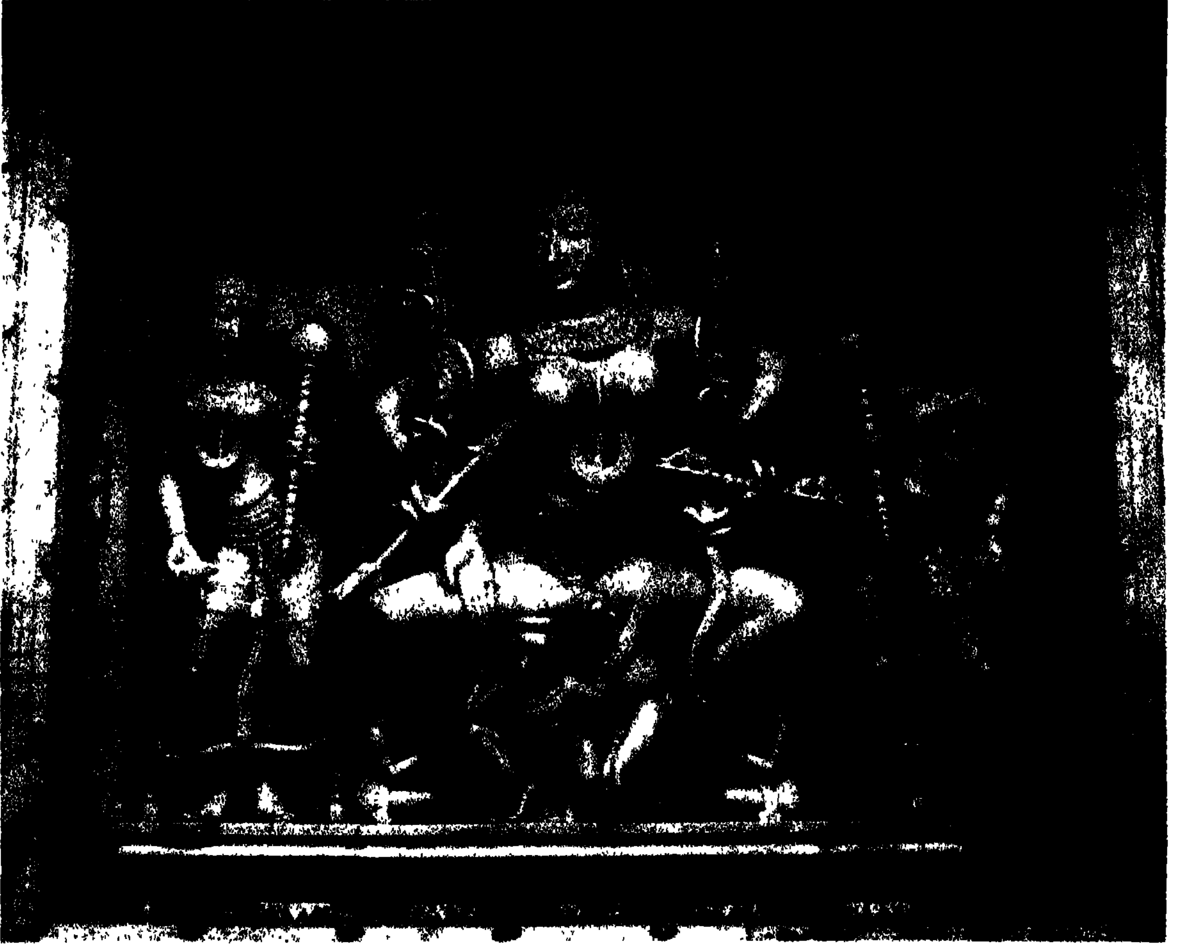


Cakreśvarī

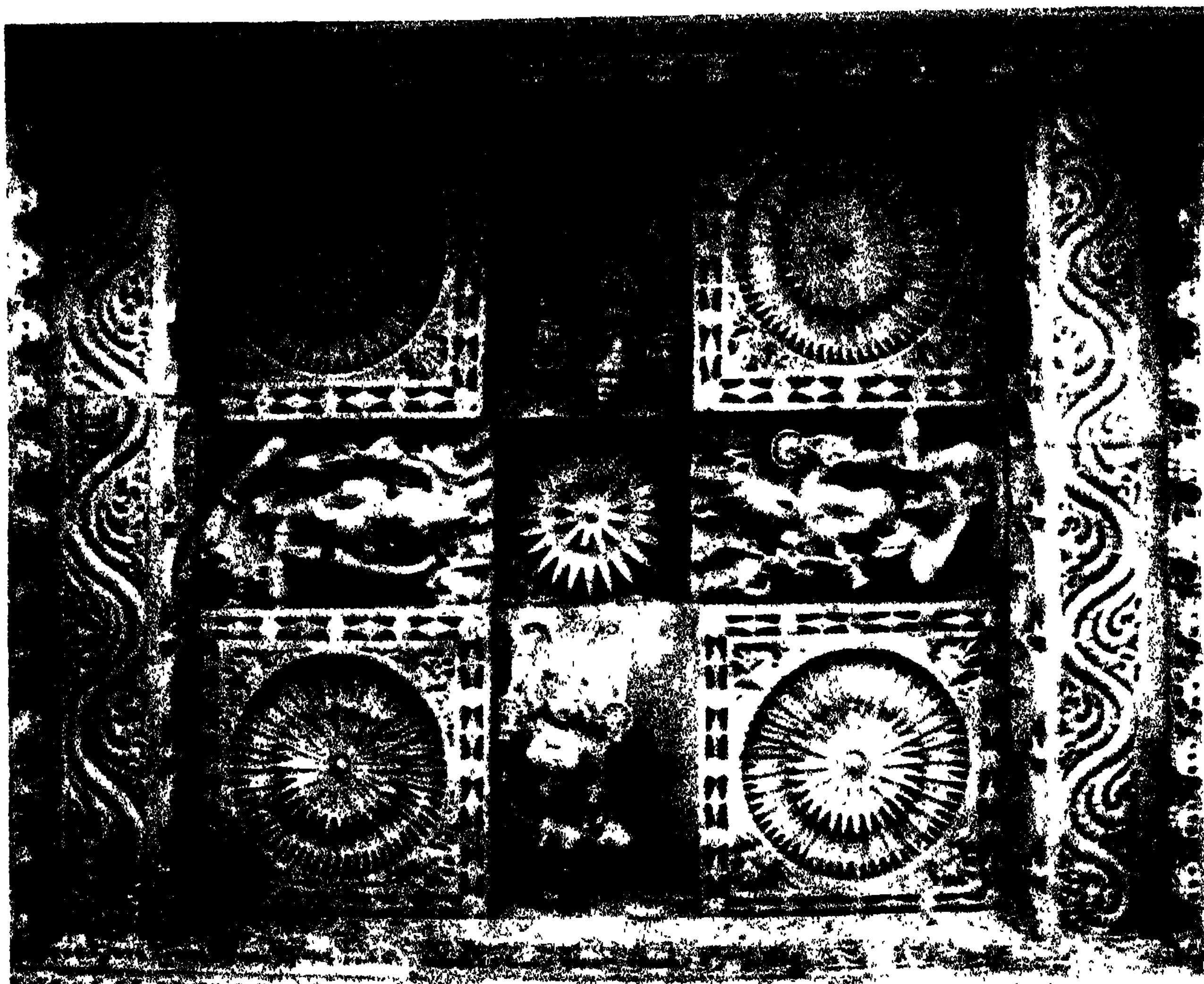
Golden-coloured, seated on a *garuḍa*, with one
right arm in the *varada* position and the others
holding an arrow, a disc and a goad, originated
in that congregation and became the Lord's messenger deity.

—*Triṣaṣṭiṣalākāpuruṣacaritra*[13]

Cakreśvarī is a popular *yakṣī* amongst the Jains whose images on the pedestal of the first *tīrthaṅkara* Ṛṣabhanātha as well as on her own are seen amongst many sculptures in the Jain temples. The images of Cakreśvarī, according to Śvetāmbara tradition, are mainly four and eight-armed. According to Digāmbara tradition, however, she is shown with two, four, six, eight, ten, twelve, sixteen or even twenty arms. In these images she is depicted bearing various articles, one of which is always some variation of *cakra*, a disc. She is also always shown riding a *garuḍa*. In painted illustrations she is shown with golden complexion, holding two



Goddess Cakreśvarī, seated in *lalitāsana*, on a corridor ceiling in the Vimalavasāhi temple. On her either side are *caurī*-bearers (Close-up of picture on page 88).



A *samatala* corridor ceiling in the Lunavasāhi temple, with four goddesses seated in *lalitāsana*, two four-armed and two six-armed. The four-armed goddesses are identified as Apraticakra and Mānavī, and the other two as Mānasī and Gaurī. The centre of the ceiling has a full-blown lotus, with two rows of petals, and four *kīrttimukhas* in the corners.

cakras in her upper hands and a fruit in one of the lower, and making *varadamudrā* with the other.

There are many variations of the image of Cakreśvarī. An eleventh century image, now in Deogarh Museum in Uttar Pradesh, shows Cakreśvarī with twenty arms. She sits on a lotus on the head of *garuḍa*. Above her is seated jina flanked by garland-bearers. Her various arms hold a rosary, a sword, a conch, a snake in addition to the items above.

In the Vimalavasāhi temple, the eight-armed Cakreśvarī is seated in *lalitāsana* posture, flanked by two female *cauri* bearers. She is mounted on a *garuḍa*. In her four arms on the left she bears goad, disc, *vajra*, and a bow; in her four arms on the right, she has a noose, a disc, an arrow, and a *varadamudrā*. On top there is a panel of celestial musicians, and on the lower level there are two small figures of worshippers.

An eight-armed image of *yakṣī* Cakreśvarī is on a corridor ceiling in Lunavasāhi temple. Sitting in *lalitāsana*, she carries a ring, *abhayamudrā*, a disc and *varadamudrā* in her right hands, and a ring, *jñānamudrā*, a disc and a *mātuluṅga* in her left hands. Her mount *garuḍa* is represented in the zoomorphic form below her right folded foot.

Vidyādevīs

Goddesses of Knowledge

In the middle of the world there are countless
continents and oceans with auspicious names
(like) Jambūdvīpa...There are seven zones here
in Jambūdvīpa: Bharata, Haimavarta...
In the centre of Bharata is mount Vaitadhya...
On its northern and southern slopes...are
two rows of vidyādhara cities...
'I am the Master's slave, you two are his servants.
As the fruit of service to him I give you lordship
over the vidyādhara. Know that it has been obtained
only by the service to the master...' After enlightening
them (Nami and Vinami) in this way he (Dharanendra)
gave them the 48000 vidyās. He instructed
them 'Go to Vaitadhya, found two rows of cities
here, and establish imperishable sovereignty'.
—*Triṣaṣtiṣalākāpuruṣacaritra*[14]

Of all conceptions prevalent in Jain iconography, none is quite so original as the conception of the *vidyādevīs* — 'goddesses of learning'. Vidyās are the arts, the *mantra* or magical chants. *Vidyādevīs* are the personifications of these chants.

Vidyādevīs are sixteen in number, far more numerous than in other religious traditions of India. The conception and imagery of the sixteen *vidyādevīs* resembles closely those of Jain *yakṣīs*, and may have been modelled after them.[15]

The above citation refers to Nāmi and Vināmi, two former servants of *tīrthaṅkara* Ṛṣabhanātha. They began to worship him when he was engaged in meditation. To restrain them from disturbing the Master, Dharaṇendra, king of the *nāgas*, appeared and ordered them to found cities on Vaitadhya mountain and become the master of sixteen classes of *vidyādharas*, the holders of *vidyā*. The prescriptions prohibit the use of the *vidyā* to offend a *jina* or his followers. Until about tenth century, the number and names of sixteen *vidyādevīs* (or *Mahāvidyās* as they are also called) varied in literature. Only after that time, like those of other gods and goddesses, the attributes and features of the *Mahāvidyās* were clearly described and fixed.

The sixteen *vidyādevīs* are described below. The description of the *vidyādevīs* varies somewhat in the Śvetāmbara and the Digāmbara traditions. What follows is a description according to the Śvetāmbara tradition.

Rohiṇī

She rides a cow and holds in her hands a conch, rosary, bow and arrow. She presides over the art of music. She is the consort of *Mahāyakṣa*, who attends upon *tīrthaṅkara* Ajitanātha.

In the Vimalavasāhi temple, the square flat surface is boldly relieved with an image of sixteen-armed *lalitāsana* goddess Rohiṇī flanked on each side by a female *cauri*-bearer. She carries a noose, a sword, a *triśūla*, a *vajra*, an arrow, *vyākhyānamudrā*, fruit and *varadamudrā* in the right hands, and a *daṇḍa*, shield, a goad, *vyākhyānamudrā*, bow, mace, pitcher and *abhayamudrā* in the left hands. She is surrounded on three sides by a figural band comprising Gaṇeśa, Vīrabhadra, Bhairava and Mātṛkās, all with four arms and seated in *lalitāsana*.

On page 131

The main dome in the *raṅgamaṇḍapa* in the Lunavasāhi temple, with different number of *vidyādevīs*.

Prajñapti

She rides on a peacock and holds a lotus and a Śakti in her hands. Her name suggests 'intellect'; Prajña also refers to Sarasvatī.





Sixteen *vidyādevīs* in the *raṅgamaṇḍapa* in the Lunavasāhi temple. Below them are sixteen *vidyādharas* playing different musical instruments.



Vajraśṛṅkhalā

There are two forms of this goddess: in one she is seated on a lotus, and she carries a chain and club. In another form, she is also seated on a lotus but her four hands are adorned with *varadamudrā*, chain, lotus and another chain.

Vajrāṅkuśī

She too has two forms: in one she rides an elephant and bears a sword, *vajra*, shield and spear as her symbols. In another, she is riding an elephant in *varadamudrā*, with *vajra*, citrus and goad in her hands. Her name 'one adorned with *vajra* and goad' suggests some connection with Indra.

Apraticakrā or Jambunāda

She rides a *garuḍa* and all her four hands are armed with discs. By her name and symbols, she bears resemblance to *yakṣinī* of *tīrthaṅkara* Ṛṣabhanātha.

Naradattā

There are two versions of her in Śvetāmbara tradition: in one she holds a sword and a shield, in another she rides a buffalo and carries in her four hands *varada*, sword, citrus and shield.

Kālī

There are two Śvetāmbara versions of this *vidyādevī*: in one, she is seated on a lotus and holds in two hands a club and *varada* or in four hands a rosary, club, *vajra* and *abhaya*. Her name and symbols suggest similarity with Śvetāmbara *yakṣinī* of *tīrthaṅkara* Abhinandana.

Mahākālī

There are two versions of her description: in one, she rides a man and holds a rosary, fruit, bell and a *varadamudrā*. In another, she rides a man but holds a rosary, *vajra*, *abhayamudrā* and bell.

Gaurī

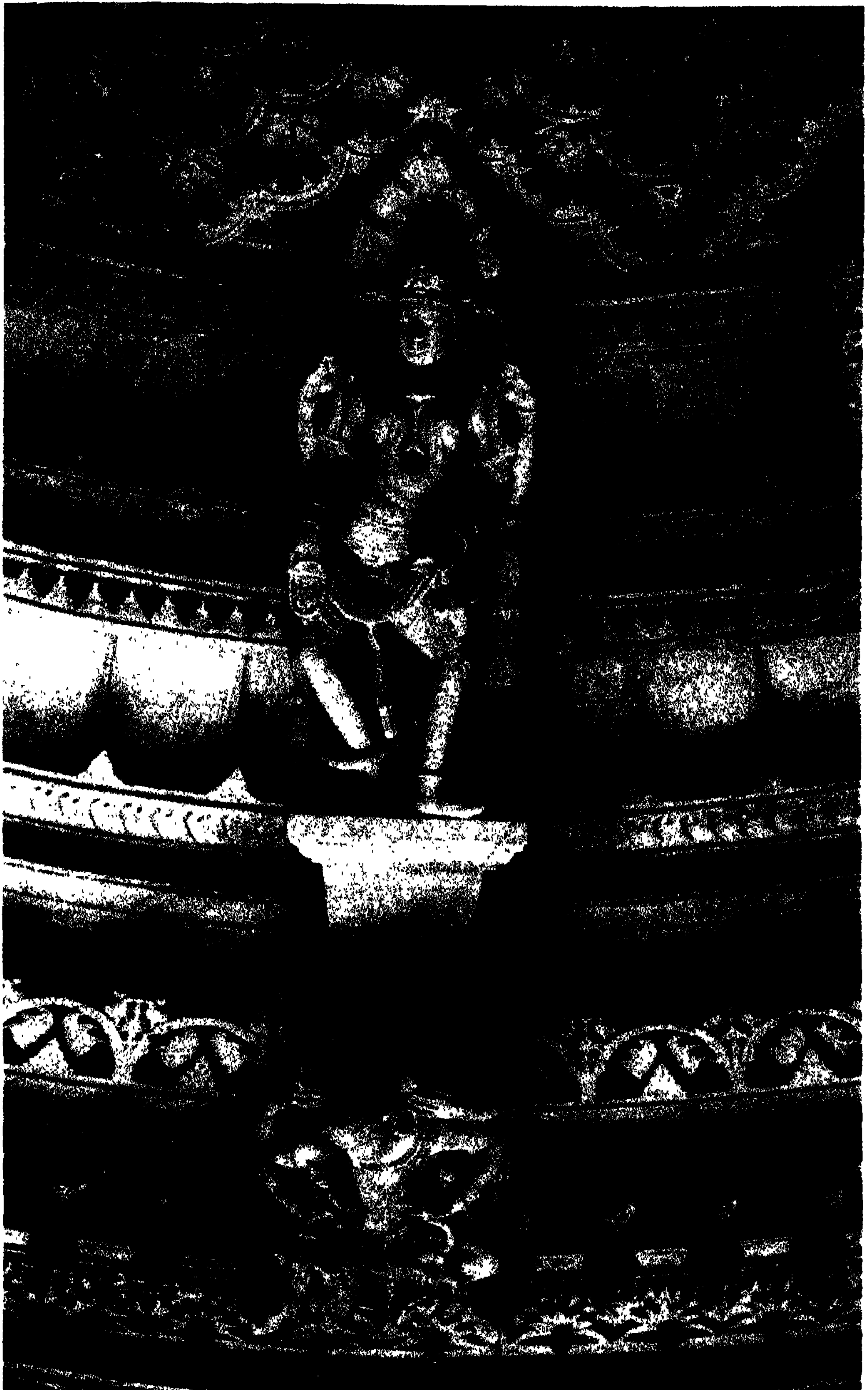
She rides an alligator and bears in her four hands *varada*, club, rosary and water-lily. The alligator and symbols of water-lily and urn suggest her connection with the goddess Gaṅgā.

Gandhārī

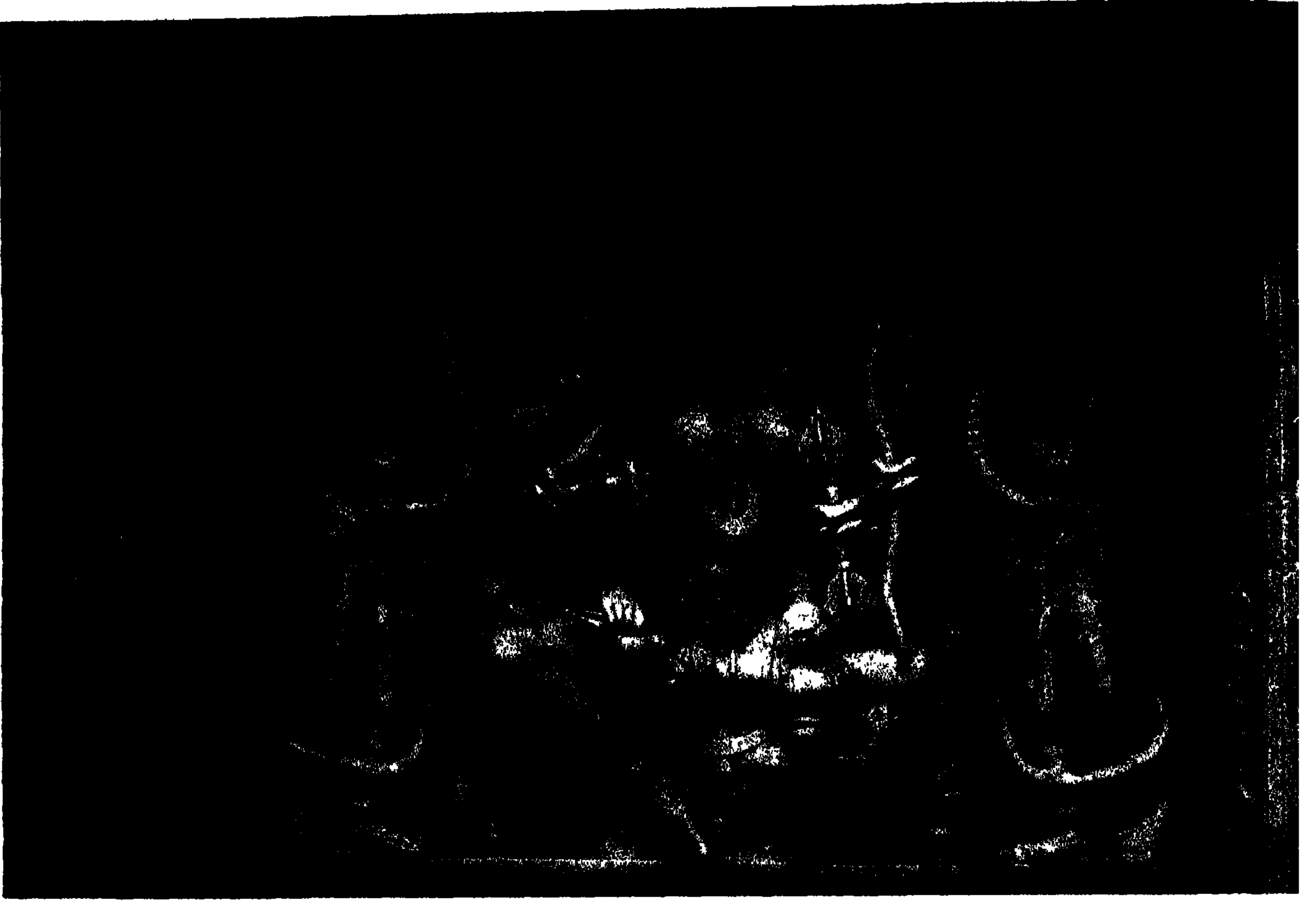
She is seated on a lotus, and holds a staff and *vajra* in her two hands, or staff, *abhaya*, *varada* and *vajra* in her four hands. Gandhārī is associated with the river goddess Yamunā.

Mahājvālā or Jvālāmālinī

She rides a cat but her other attributes are uncertain.



Sixteen *vidyadevis* in the *rangamandapa* in the Lunavasahi temple. Below them are sixteen *vidyādharas* playing different musical instruments



Goddess Acchuptā seated in *lalitāsana* on her horse mount, on a corridor ceiling in the Vimalavasāhi temple. The sixteen-armed goddess is accompanied on each side by a *caurī-bearer*. Above her are hovering *vidyādharas* showering *abhiṣeka* water on the goddess or playing music. Below is seen a band of lotus scrolls that issue from the mouth of a *kīrttimukha* carved in the centre.

Mānavī

She sits on a lotus and her hands show *varadamudrā*, rosary, and a bough of a tree.

Mānasī

There are two versions of this *vidyādevī*: in one, she rides a swan and bears the attributes of *varada* and *vajra*. In another, she sits on a lion and has *varadamudrā*, *vajras* and rosary in her hands.

Vairoṭyā

> वैरोटीं श्यामवर्णामजगरवाहनां।
> चतुर्भुजां खड्गोरगालङ्कृतदक्षिणकरां खेटकाहियुतवामकराम्।
>
> —*Nirvāṇakalikā*

Vairoṭyā rides a snake and carries in her hands a sword, snakes and a shield. She is depicted on a corridor ceiling in Vimalavasāhi, in a Devakulikā, with sixteen arms, riding a snake below a stool on which she sits in *lalitāsana*. In her right hands she carries a snake, a disc, *triśūla*, noose, sword, *vajraghaṇṭā* and *varadamudrā*. In her left hands she has a snake, a shield, a *daṇḍa*, a lotus, *vajra*, a snake and a pitcher. Her two other hands rest on the head of a *nāga* and a *nāgin*, who are depicted with their hands in *añjalī*

mudrā. She has a seven-hooded cobra canopy overhead and is attended on both sides by a female *caurī*-bearer. Above her is a row of *gandharvas* and *vidyādharas*.

Acchuptā

She rides a horse, and holds in her hands a bow, sword, shield and arrow. In the corridor ceiling in the Vimalavasāhi, accompanied on each side by a *caurī*-bearer, is an image of sixteen-armed *vidyādevī* Acchuptā sitting in *lalitāsana*. Her mount is a horse, shown below her left leg. In her right hands she carries a chain, a ring, a goad, a noose, an arrow, *vyākhyānamudrā*, a *paraśu* and a conch. In her left hands she carries a chain, a trumpet, a *daṇḍa*, a bow, a *vajra*, a pitcher, a club and *abhayamudrā*. Above the image are *vidyādharas* showering *abhiṣeka* water on the goddess.

Mahāmānasī

The sixteenth *vidyādevī* rides a lion and bears in her four hands *varada*, sword, *kamaṇḍalū* and a lance.

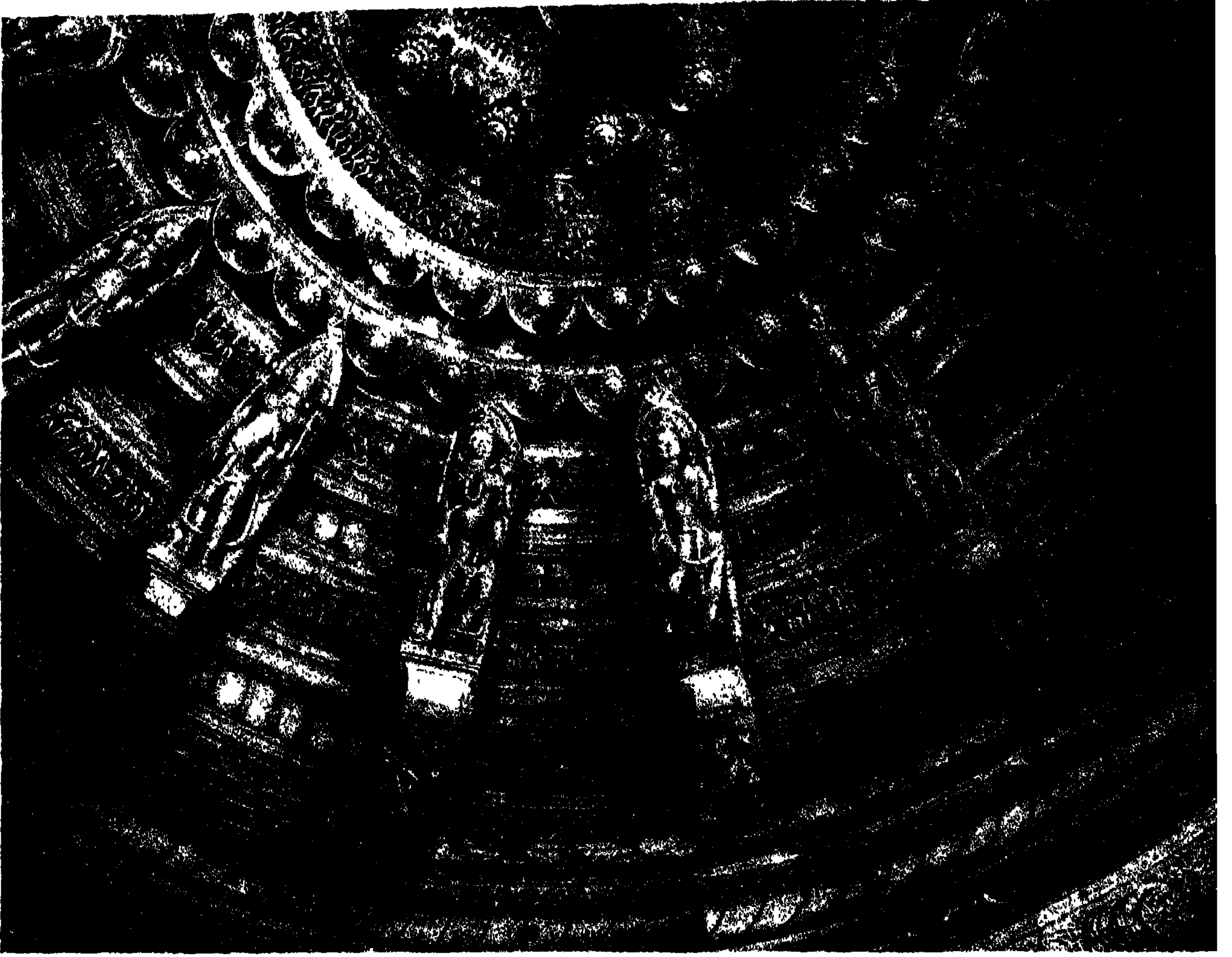
> महामानसीं धवलवर्णां सिंहवाहनाम्।
> चतुर्भजां वरदासियुक्तदक्षिणकरां कुण्डिकाफालकयुतवामहस्ताम्।
> —*Nirvāṇakalikā*

With her lion mount, an image of twenty-armed *vidyādevī Mahāmānasī*, is sitting in *lalitāsana*, in corridor ceiling in the Vimalavasāhi temple. She is flanked on each side by an image of eight-armed divinity. In her right hands, she holds a sword, a lotus, an arrow, a *triśūla*, a *daṇḍa*, a goad, *vyākhyānamudrā*, a snake, a club and *varadamudrā*. In her left hands, she has a shield, a club, a bow, a noose, a *vajra*, *abhayamudrā*, a conch, a pot, a *paraśu* and a lotus.

It is not often that all of sixteen *vidyādevīs* are depicted in art in one location. At Vimalavasāhi, on the ceiling of a pillared *maṇḍapa*, the standing figures of sixteen *vidyādevīs* are represented, each with six arms and other associated attributes. Below these figures are pillars and *toraṇa*-arches with intricate carving.

In the *raṅgamaṇḍapa* dome of the Vimalavasāhi and the Lunavasāhi the set of sixteen *vidyādevīs*, with their respective attributes and mounts, is represented as bracket figures standing on *vidyādharas*.

In addition, in the Vimalavasāhi temple, there are four more sets of sixteen *vidyādevīs* in the corridor ceilings. In two of these sets they are seated in *lalitāsana* and have four arms; in the third set they are represented in standing attitude, and in the fourth set they are in standing attitude but with six arms each. Their mounts are not shown in any of these representations. In another corridor ceiling, eight standing *vidyādevīs* are shown.



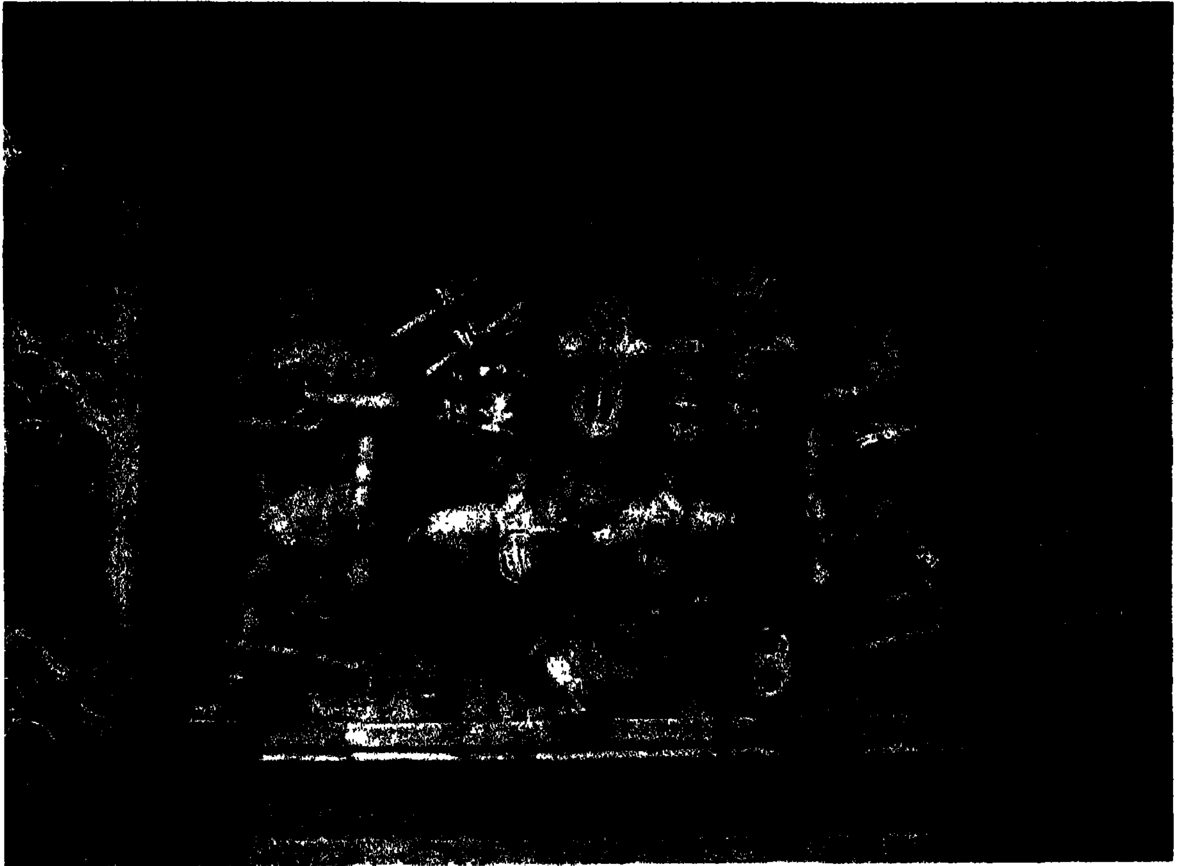
Dome in the *raṅgamaṇḍapa* of the Vimalavasāhi temple. Sixteen *vidyādevīs* and *vidyādharas* are shown in the dome. The dome is 25 ft in diameter and less than 30 ft in height from the floor to the apex. The dome is composed of eleven circular courses and a long circular *padmaśilā*.

In another ceiling, in the Vimalavasāhi, four of them are shown along two diagonals; they are seated in *lalitāsana* and are four-armed. Their mounts are also shown: Vajrāṅkuśī with elephant, Apraticakra with eagle, Prajñapti with peacock and Vajraśṛṅkhalā with lotus.

Four corridor ceilings in the Vimalavasāhi are dedicated to the depiction of sixteen-armed *vidyādevīs* Rohiṇī, Acchuptā and Vairoṭyā with their bull, horse and snake mounts respectively, and twenty-armed *vidyādevī* Mahāmānasī with her lion mount.

In Lunavasāhi the *vidyādevīs* are seen not only in the dome of the *raṅgamaṇḍapa* but also on the *pīṭha* of the *gūḍhamaṇḍapa* and the *mukhamaṇḍapa* and on the corridor ceilings.

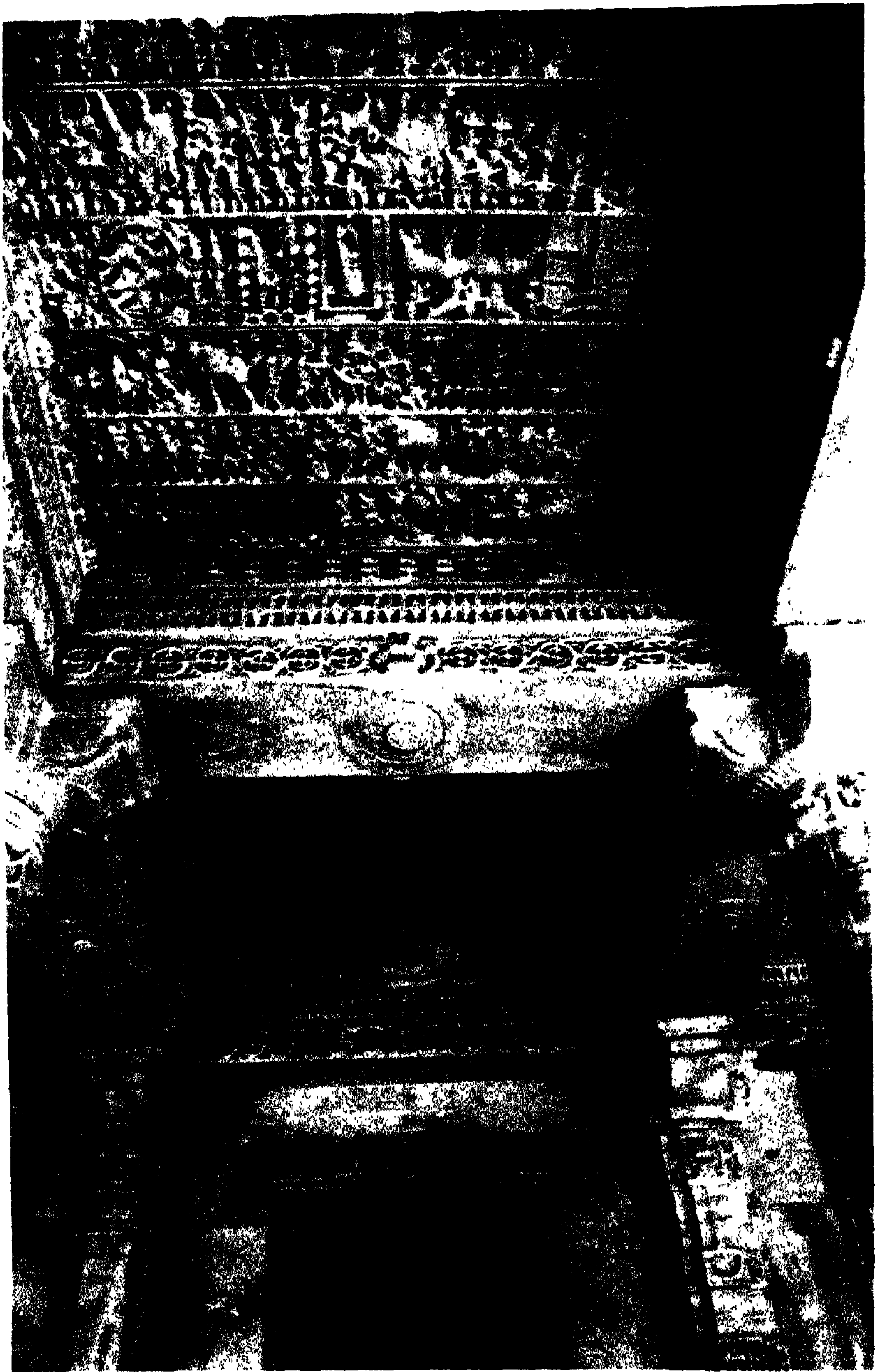
As part of iconographic evolution, towards the end of the thirteenth century the multi-armed images of *vidyādevīs* in Jain temples became quite infrequent.



Goddess Mahāmānasī seated in *lalitāsana* on her lion mount, on a corridor ceiling in the Vimalavasāhi temple. The twenty-armed goddess is flanked on each side by eight-armed divinities.

Notes

1. *Folk Images in India,* pp. 122-3.
2. *The Hindu Temple,* vol. I, pp. 165-6.
3. Lannoy, R. *The Speaking Tree,* pp. 62-3.
4. Neumann, E. *The Great Mother,* pp. 44, 138.
5. Bynner, W. tr. *Lao Tzu, The Way of Life,* p. 54.
6. Pal, P. *Sensuous Sculpture,* p. 10.
7. Pereira, J. *Monolithic Jinas,* p. xiv.
8. As quoted by U.P. Shah, "Iconography of the Jaina Goddess Sarasvatī", J. of the University of Bombay, 10, 1941, 195-218.
9. Kinsley, D. *Hindu Goddesses,* p. 60.
10. Ibid., p. 62.
11. As quoted by Jain and Fischer, *Jaina Iconography,* Part 1, p. 4.
12. Maury, C. *Folk Origins of Indian Art,* pp. 101-2.
13. As quoted by B.C. Bhattacharya, *The Jaina Iconography,* p. 45.
14. As quoted by B.C. Bhattacharya, *The Jaina Iconography,* Part 1, p. 137.
15. For a comprehensive description about *vidyādevīs* see, Shah, U.P. *Jaina-Rūpa-Maṇḍana,* and Bhattacharya, B.C. *The Jaina Iconography.*



Renunciation of Neminātha on a *samatala* corridor ceiling in the Lunavasāhi temple.

Chapter VII

Across the Bhavasāgar

Jinas and their Images

Tīrthaṅkara Pārśvanātha

Meghamalin, the beast of gods, approached to attack Pārśvanātha, like an elephant...The blessed one was not shaken, his eyes motionless in meditation...Elephants created by him attacked, trumpeting, dripping with *mada*, their trunks lifted loftily like living mountains. The Master was not disturbed...Then Asura Meghamalin himself created clouds in the sky, like the night at the end of the world...Lightning flashed in the sky, terrifying like a tongue of death...he beat the earth with streams of water...When the water reached the tip of Śrī Pārśvanātha's nose, then the throne of the Dharana, the Indra of the Uragas (nāgas) shook...Then the Nāga-king went with his wives to the Teacher of the World with speed, as if competing with the mind. Dharana bowed to the Master and placed beneath his feet a tall lotus with erect stalks, resembling the seed of an omniscient. The serpent king covered the Lord's back, sides and chest with his own coils and made an umbrella with seven hoods over his head.

—*Triṣaṣtiśālākapuruṣacaritra*[1]

Pārśvanātha, the twenty-third *tīrthaṅkara,* is certainly one of the most popular images worshipped by the Jains. He is said to have lived in the eighth century B.C. and believed to be the spiritual forerunner of Mahāvīra. The image of Pārśvanātha is generally found in all Jain shrines, seated either in *padmāsana,* 'lotus posture', or standing in *kāyotsarga* posture. On painted *patta,* cloth, and sculptured plaques, Pārśvanātha is often depicted with *sahasraphana,* a 'thousand-hooded serpent', generally represented by seven or five hoods.

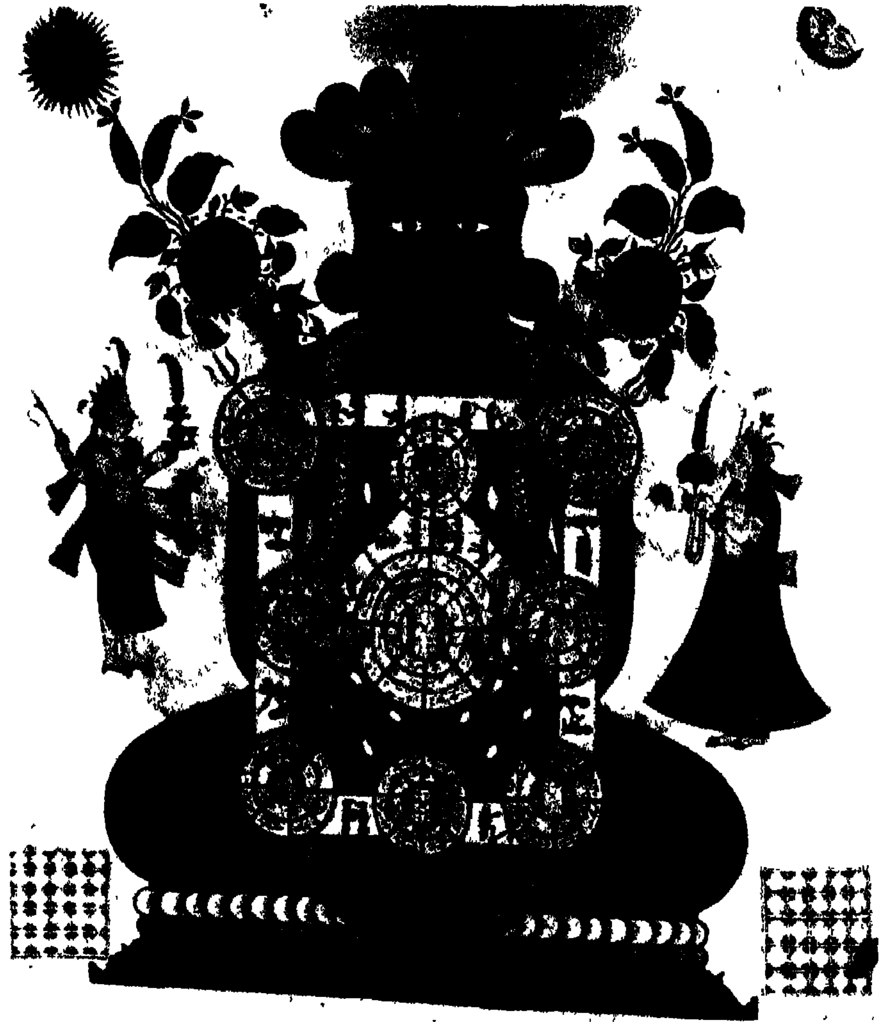
At the Ādīśvara temple at Ranakpur, sculpted in white marble, there is an exquisite work depicting Pārśvanātha standing, with a 'thousand-hooded', *sahasraphana,* serpent over his head, with its coils spread all over the piece. On the two sides are *yakṣa* and *yakṣiṇī,* shown as half human and half snake, and two *caurī*-bearing *nāginis.* On top are two elephants showering Pārśvanātha.

The legend has it that Pārśvanātha practised severe austerities to resist the temptations of cloud-rain demon, Meghamalin. In painted illustrations, the ascetic Pārśvanātha is depicted as standing and meditating in a flood of water submerged upto his chin. In one painting, he is shown attended by the nāga couple. Like Mārā's attack on Buddha, in sculptured panels, as in Jain caves at Badami and Ellora, the assault of the demon Meghamalin

and his associates and the rescue of the great ascetic by the nāga couple is depicted. The cultic images in the temples, as in Ranakpur, do not usually show the demons, though the attendant *nāga* couples are always shown.

In a second century, red sandstone sculpture, Mathura, Kushana style, at the State Museum in Lucknow, Pārśvanātha sits in the *padmāsana* position. Seated in meditation, Pārśvanātha is seen with seven-hooded snake forming an umbrella over head.

Relief in a cave at, Ellora, Maharashtra, ninth century, shows Pārśvanātha engaged in *kāyotsarga* austerities. A snakes is entwined behind him with its multi-hooded head over him. On one side a couple is kneeling in adoration of the *jina*, on the other a *yakṣī* is standing with her arm raised, holding back a demon. In the middle, a demon on a water-buffalo and a lion are shown approaching. Above, a canopy and flying *gandharva* are seen rejoicing.



Tīrthaṅkara Pārśvanātha, in meditation, painted on cloth, 17th century, Rajasthan.

Courtesy: Ravi Kumar, *The Jain Cosmology*.

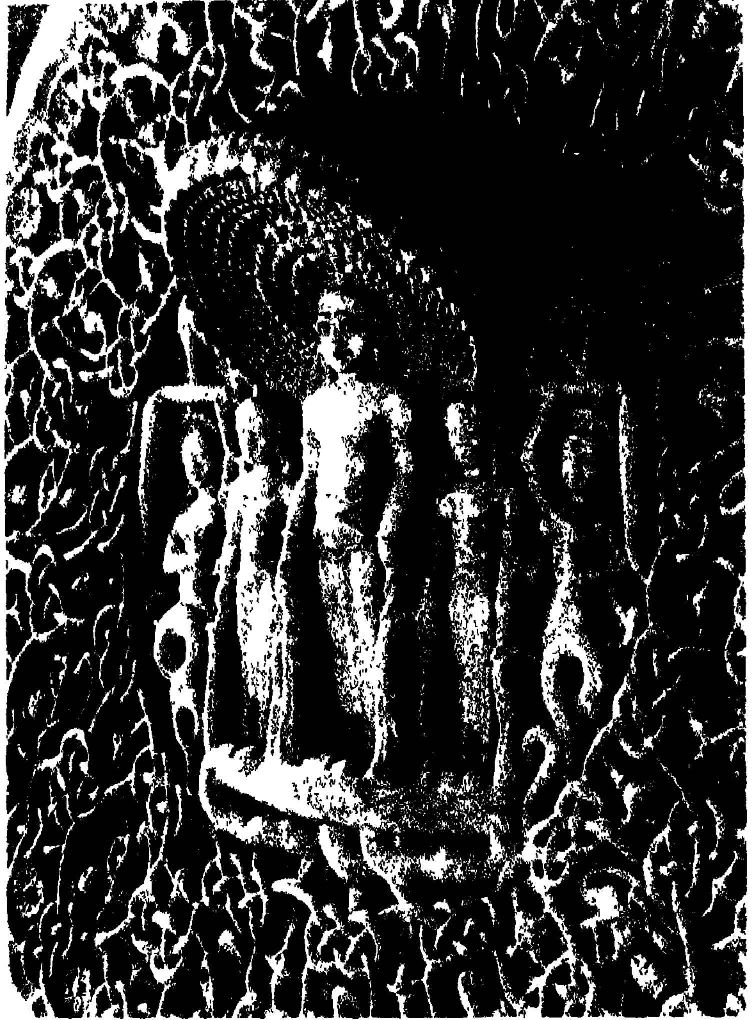


Buddha sheltered by Muchalinda Bronze with green patina 13th Century, Lopburi style, Thailand.

Courtesy. Los Angeles County Museum of Art



Descent of Gangā and Śiva protected by serpent hoods, Mahabalipuram.



Pārśvanātha with a thousand-hooded serpent accompanied by *nāginī caurī*-bearers and *yakṣīs*. In the coils of the serpent there are many nāginīs. Ādīśvara temple, Ranakpur.

A brown sandstone sculpture, in Gwalior, M.P., tenth century, shows Pārśvanātha in a *caumukha*, 'fourfold' image. The image consists of Pārśvanātha and three other *jinas* facing in all four directions. The four *tīrthaṅkara* are seated on lion thrones and sheltered by trees, indicating the vent of their enlightenment. Above the *jina* appear fragments of *gandharva*, 'flying celestial beings'.

The Jain cave at Aihole, Bijapur district, Karnataka, is one of the earliest known representations of the scene of attack on Pārśvanātha, dating back to sixth or early seventh century A.D. The relief shows Pārśvanātha standing in meditation while Kamatha attacks him from the upper left corner. Dharaṇendra shields him by holding his five hoods over Pārśva's head. His queen, represented in human form, with a hood over his head, stands on the right of the *jina* and holds a big parasol over the Lord. Behind the snake-queen is seen the head of another figure with a hood above the head. The male figure sitting with folded hands on the left of the *jina* represents defeated Kamatha bowing down and repenting.

The life-story of the Tīrthaṅkara Pārśvanātha is depicted on a corridor ceiling in the Lunavasahi temple. The *samatala* ceiling is raised up by a square frame of four rectangular slabs bearing decorations of *ardhapadma* pattern on the inner face and a row of *campaka* flowers on the two narrow undersides.

The presence of a multi-hooded serpent, both as a protector and a threat, has had a long history in Indian art and iconography. In Buddhist art and tradition, the Mucalinda Nāga protects Buddha during a storm; images of Buddha, with cobra-hoods over his head, are known at sites like Amaravati and Nagarjunikonda. In Hinduism, serpent Kāliya is subdued by child Kṛṣṇa as he dances over his head. Earlier, as a newly born child, when Kṛṣṇa is transported from the prison to Gokul across the river Yamuna by his father, the serpent Śeṣa spreads its hoods over the child to protect him from the torrential rains. Viṣṇu rests on the coils of the great Śeṣa Nāga, with his thousand heads held as canopy over the Lord. Śiva is always shown with snakes coiled around him.

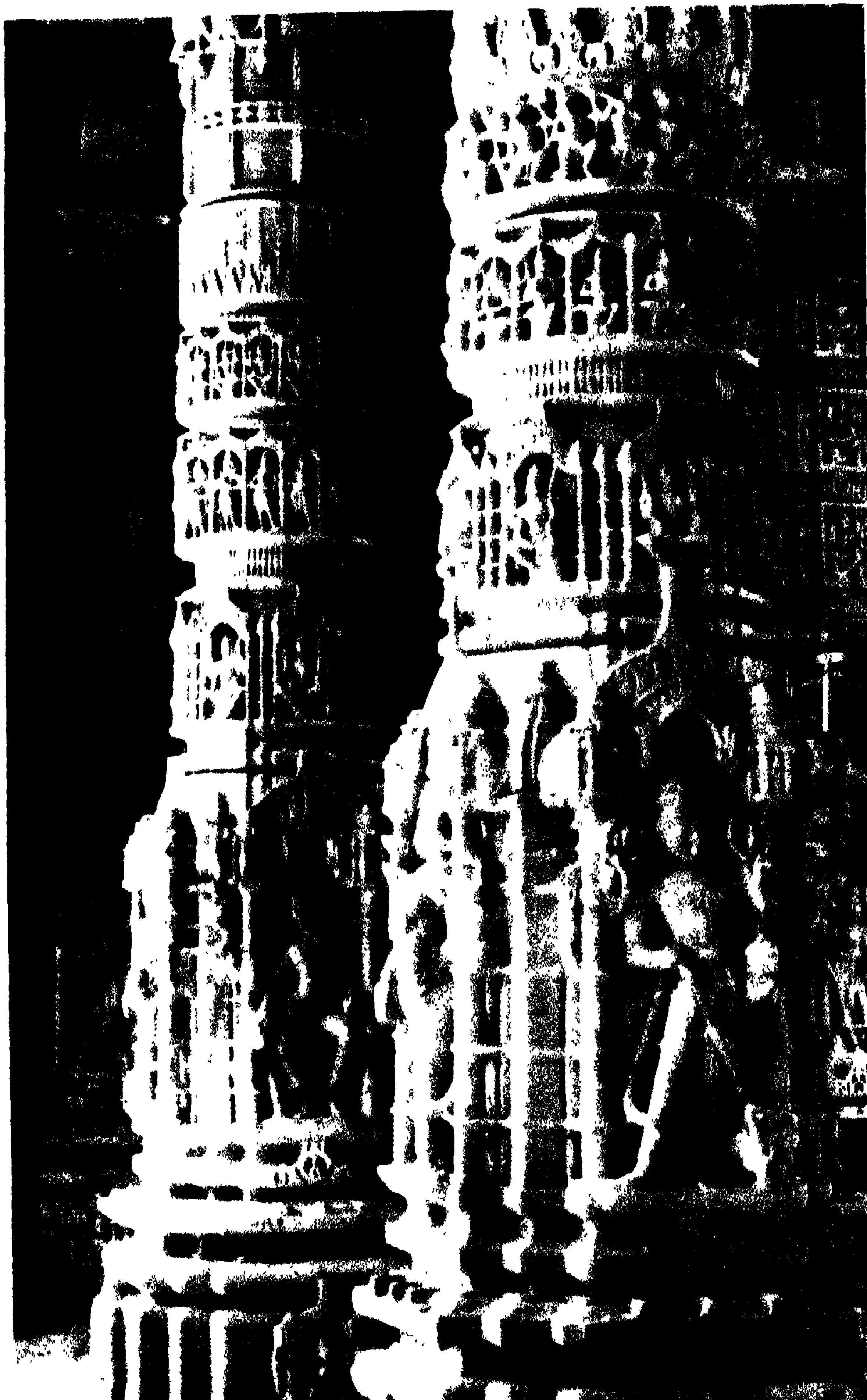
A serpent is both benevolent, like Dharaṇendra, Śeṣa or Mucalinda, and malevolent, like Kāliya or Mārā, Kamatha or Vṛtra. This ever present and unceasing struggle between the forces of light and darkness, between good and evil, and between life and death goes on in the same body, represented by a serpent. Nāga with his thousand hoods is like the mind. When subdued and sublimated, the same mind is transformed from a malevolent to a benevolent force. Myths and legends associated with Buddha, Pārśvanātha, Śeṣasāyī-Viṣṇu, Śiva and child Kṛṣṇa represent this thousand-hooded nature of mind in myriad ways. This is perhaps best expressed in the Gita: *mana eva manuṣ-yanam karanam bandha-mokṣayoh* — "It is the mind that is the root cause of bondage or emancipation."

Neminātha

Neminātha is the twenty-second *tīrthaṅkara*. Also known as Ariṣṭanemi, Neminātha is a popular subject for Jain icons. Neminātha's life is also associated with Kṛṣṇa's; according to Jain Purāṇas, Kṛṣṇa and Neminātha were cousins.

In two corridor ceilings of the Lunavasāhi temple, scenes from the life of Neminātha and the early life of Kṛṣṇa at Gokul are depicted. These scenes include fight between Kṛṣṇa and Jarāsanda and a marriage procession.

Life scenes of *tīrthaṅkara* Neminātha are shown in a corridor ceiling in the Vimalavasāhi temple. The scenes are arranged in three concentric circular bands, with four-armed goddesses standing in each corner of the *samatala* ceiling.



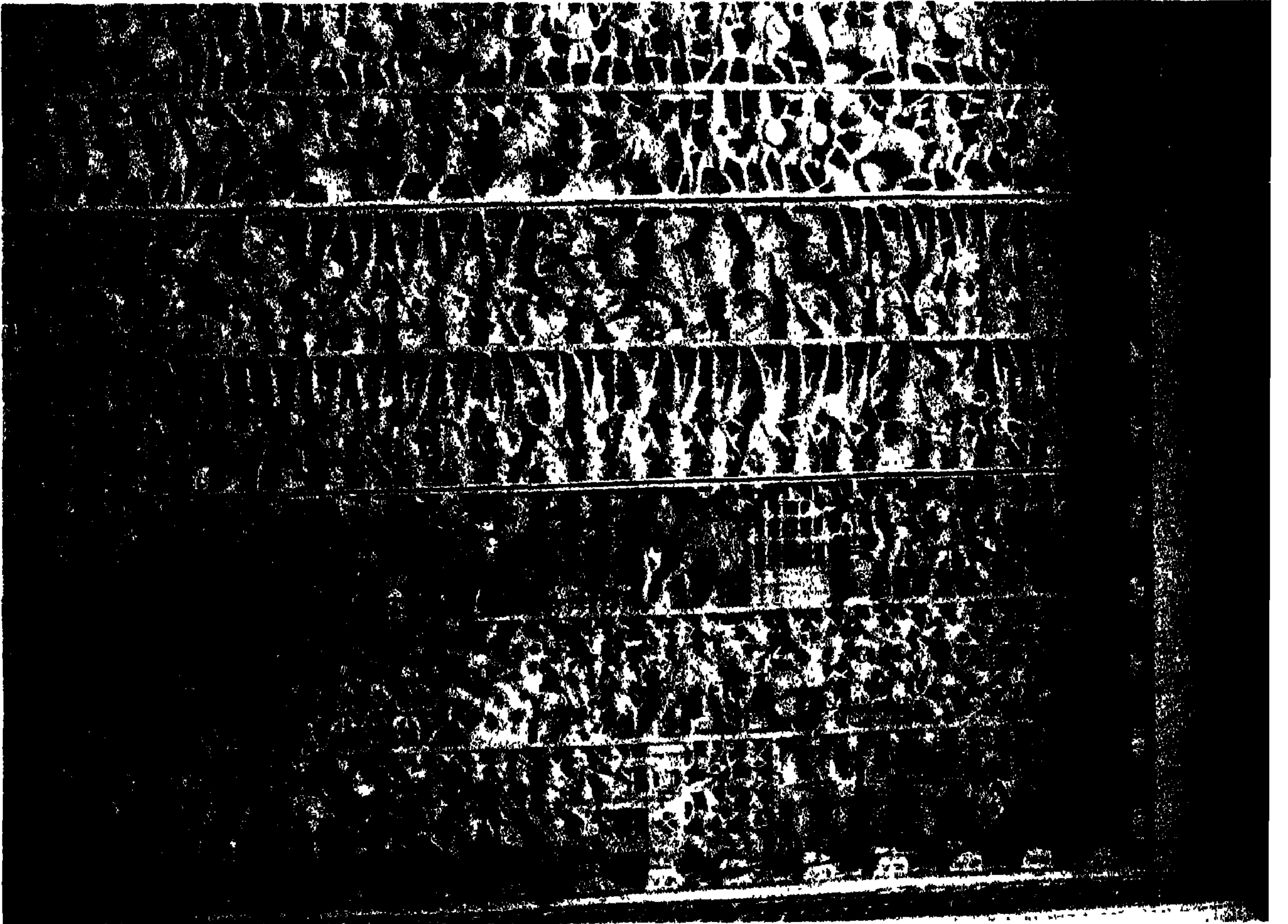
Pillars in the Lunavasāhi temple with carvings of *yaksas*, dancers and goddesses

The renunciation of *tīrthaṅkara* Nemināthа is shown on a corridor ceiling in Lunavasāhi temple, depicting marriage of Nemi and Rajimati, their returning home in a palanquin, and Neminātha's *dīkṣā*, renunciation from the worldly life. The rectangular frame of the *samatala* ceiling is carved with a band of *kīrttimukhas.*

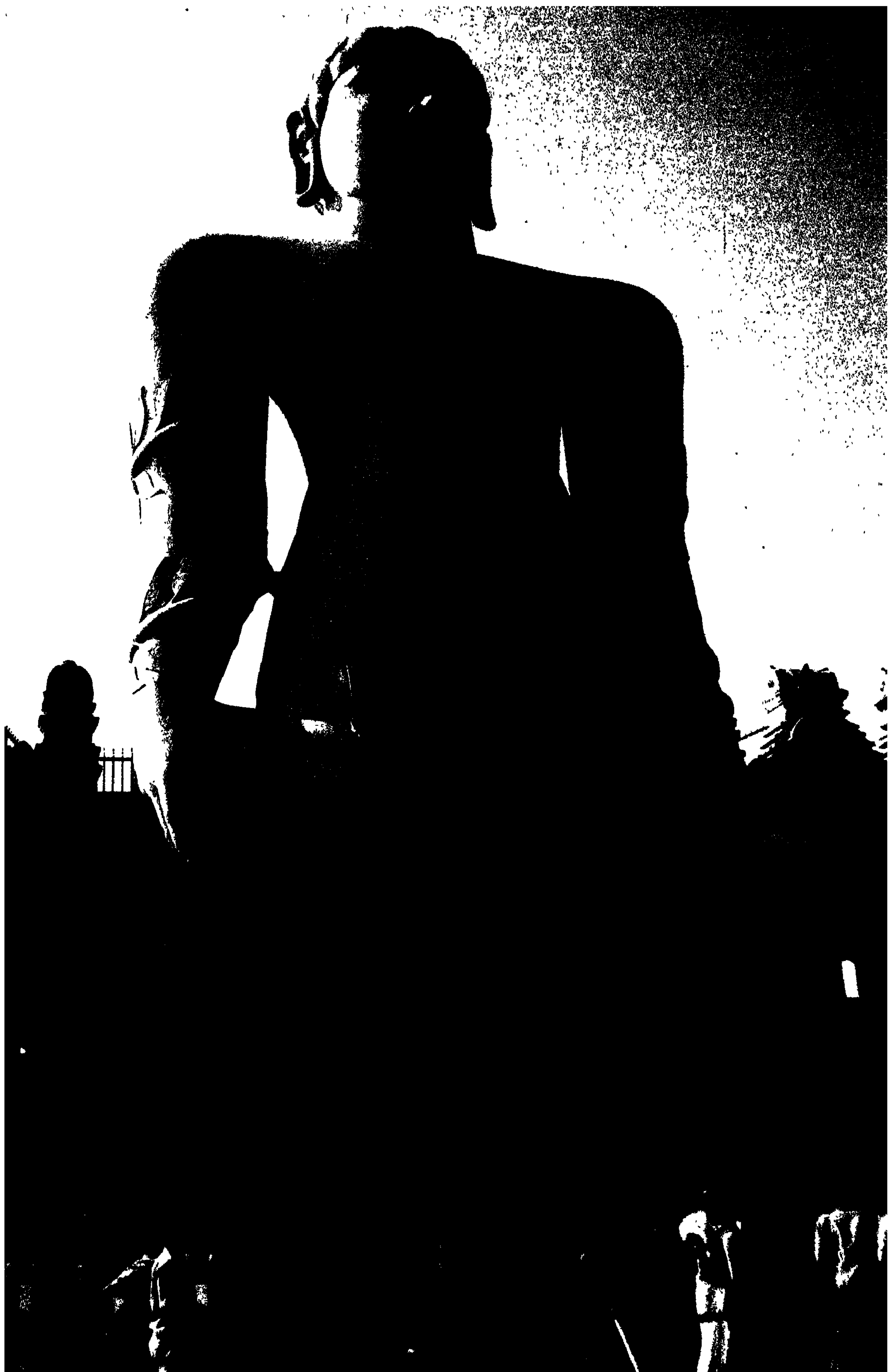
Śāntinātha

The square flat ceiling in the corridor in Vimalavasāhi temple shows, in three concentric circles, the *pañcakalyāṇakas* of *tīrthaṅkara* Śāntinātha and his earlier birth as king Megharatha. An image of a four-armed goddess is shown in each corner.

The life-story of *tīrthaṅkara* Śāntinātha on a corridor ceiling is shown in the Lunavasāhi temple. The rectangular frame lifting up the *samatala* ceiling is carved with a band of *kīrttimukhas.*



Life-story of *tīrthaṅkara* Śāntinātha on a corridor ceiling in the Lunavasāhi temple.



Bāhubalī

The Great Ascetic

Devoted to meditation, his eyes fixed on the end of his
nose, motionless, the muni appeared like a signpost...
Plunged in the nectar of good meditation, he was
unconscious of the sun in the middle of the hot
season, like a fire-pit over his head...In the
rainy season he was no more disturbed by streams
of water than a mountain...In the winter season...
he remained comfortable from the fire of meditation...
Forest buffaloes scratched themselves on him...
families of rhinoceroses experienced the delight of
sleep at night resting with their bodies on his body...
He was surrounded completely by creepers with
hundred branches shooting up, like a drum by leather
throngs...Hawks, and sparrows, in harmony with each
other, made nests in his body covered with creepers...
Thousands of serpents hid in the thickets of creepers,
terrified by the call of the forest peacocks...

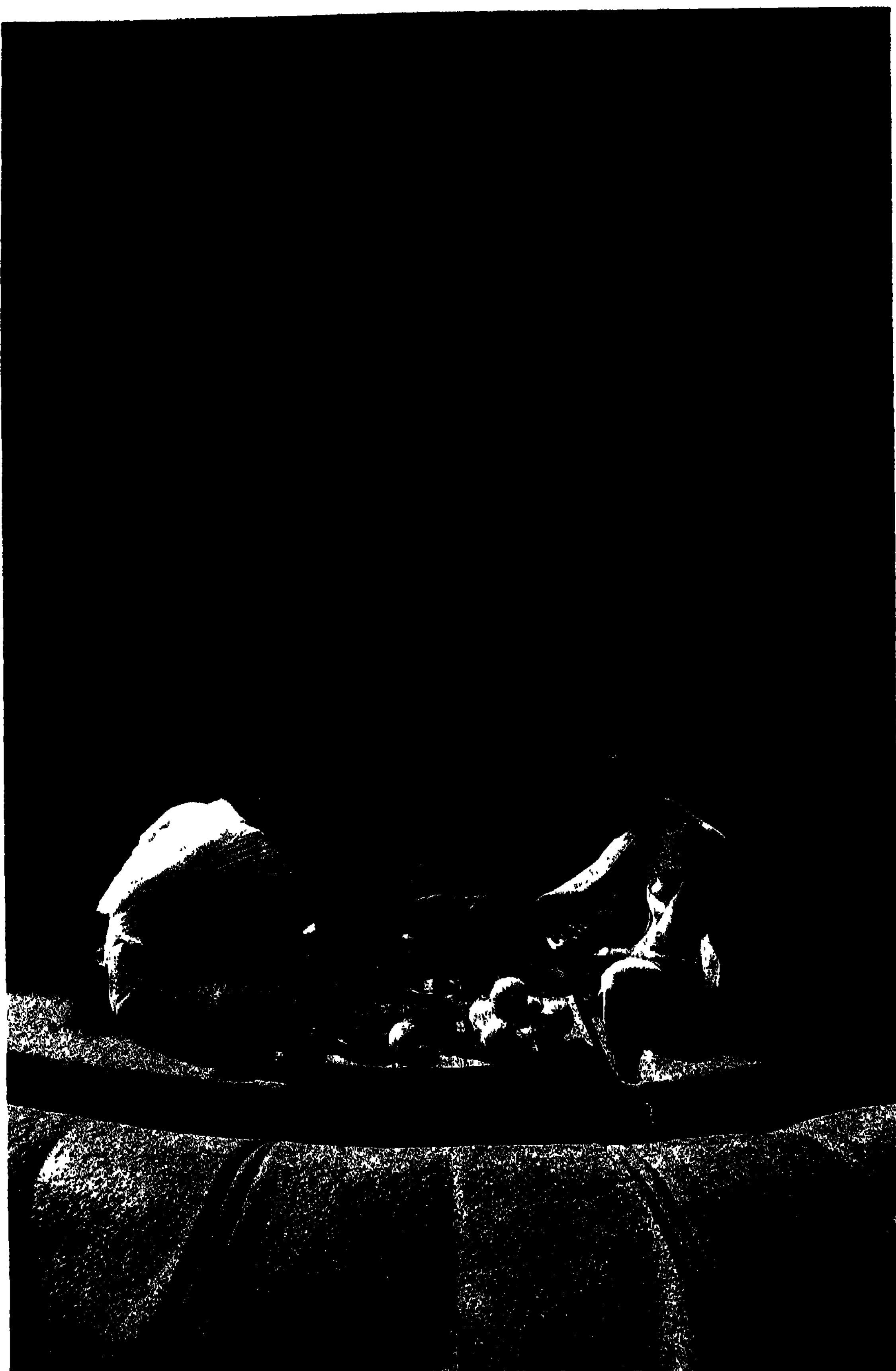
—*Triṣaṣṭiśalākāpuruṣacaritra*[1]

Bāhubalī, also known as Gommaṭa, is much honoured as one of the great Jain ascetics and is specially worshipped by the Digāmbara Jains. According to the legend, after the renunciation of the first *tīrthaṅkara* Ṛṣabhadeva, a battle ensued between his two sons, Bharata and Bāhubalī. As Bāhubalī was about to trounce Bharata in the battle, it dawned upon him that the worldly triumph was futile, and the real kingdom was not of this world. Bāhubalī then renounced his kingdom and became an ascetic. Standing in *kāyotsarga* posture of meditation, Bāhubalī practised severe penances.

A legendary fight between Bharata and Bāhubalī is depicted on a ceiling in a bay on the east side of the *raṅgamaṇḍapa* in the Lunavasāhi temple. The square panel depicts *padmamandāraka* element represented by eight *lūmās* prominently projecting on four sides of the square, and a *padmaśilā* in the centre. This ornate ceiling is *samautkṣipta* of the *padmamandāraka* variety.

On the Indragiri hill of Sravanbelgola in Karnataka stands the greatest achievement of the Ganga dynasty: the colossal statue of Gommaṭeśvara. Standing on the crest of the hill that rises majestically the colossus is visible from large distances all around. Created in 981 A.D., this 17.6m high statue of *Gommaṭa*, the son of the first *tīrthaṅkara*, has been carved out of a tall granitic tor which originally projected on the hill-top. The sculpture is finished

On page 146
Gommaṭeśvara, c. 981 A.D., **Sravanbelgola.**



Details of Gommateśvara, c 981 A.D, Sravanbelgola (Detail of page 146).

in the round from head down to the region of the thighs by the removal of the rock from behind, the front and the sides. Below the thighs, the knees and the feet are cut in very high relief with the parent rock-mass still left on the flanks and the rear.

The flanking rock-mass depict ant-hills and *kukkuṭa-sarpas* or cockatrices emerging out and from among them, and on either side emerges a *madhavi*-creeper climbing up to entwine the legs and thighs and ascending almost to the arms, near the shoulders, with their leaves spaced out and terminating in a cluster of flowers or berries. The pedestal on which Gommaṭa's feet an each measuring 2.75m, stand is a full-blown lotus. Broad-chested and majestic, Gommaṭa stands erect in the *khaḍgāsana* posture, with his arms dangling on both sides, almost reaching down to the knees, with thumbs facing in. The carving of the head, 2.3m high, is a most sublime composition in the history of art. The sharp and sensitive nose, the half-closed and contemplative eyes, the well-shaped pouting lips wearing a benign smile, that could be discerned by a viewer from any direction, the slightly projected chin with a dimple above, an imperceptibly high cheek, lobed ears and subdued and voluted curls of locks on the head invading the broad forehead — all make for a charming and serene face. The broad shoulders, 8m across, of sturdy appearance and the lack of well-modulated elbow and knee joints, the narrow hip, 3m wide in front, and rounded gluteal bulges, as if to balance the erect stance, the incurved and channelled midline of the back, the firmly planted pair of feet, all in good proportion, accentuate the beauty and stance of the figure, while at the same time in perfect correspondence with Jain iconography.[2] The nudity of the figure, indicating absolute renunciation of a *kevalin*, the stiff erectness of the stance suggesting firm determination and self-control and the beaming smile yet contemplative gaze, all blend together to bring out the greatness of conception and the mastery of the sculptor. The deft skill with which the head and its mien, the hands, the fingers and even the nails or the feet with their toes are delineated in this hard intractable *in situ* rock is something to marvel at. The whole sculpture has obviously been controlled by the height and extent of the original rock itself, and the tor on which Bāhubalī is believed to have performed his eternal penance is still shown in the rear, the sides and the foot supporting the massiveness of the hill-composition and material basal foundation for this tall sculpture. James Fergusson observed: "Nothing grander or more imposing exists anywhere out of Egypt, and even there, no known statue surpasses it in height."[3]

The Egyptian colossi, including that of Ramses, as also of the great Buddhas on the faces of the cliffs of Bamian in Afghanistan, are at best reliefs, while the Gommaṭeśvara is in the round for



Details of Gommaṭeśvara, c. 981 A.D., Sravanbelgola



A Jina in *samavasaraṇa*—the celestial assembly, Western India, c. 1975. Folio from a Laghu Samgrahanisūtra manuscript.

most of its height above the knees, with a rear side as perfectly shaped and modelled as the front. Heinrich Zimmer observed: "It is human in shape and feature, yet as inhuman as an icicle; and thus expresses perfectly the idea of successful withdrawal from the round of life and death, personal care, individual destiny, desires, sufferings and events."[4]

Added to this is the mirror-like smooth and shining polish of the entire body that brings out the rich fine grains of this grayish white granite, an art that had been lost or forgotten for more than a millennium since the workmen of Aśoka and his grandson Daśaratha had polished the extensive interiors of the Ājivika caves in the Barabar and Nagarjuni hills near Gaya in north India. For a hypaethral statue on a high hill-top exposed to sun, rain, heat, cold and abrasive dust and rain-carrying winds, the polish acts as a great refractory, a fact which the sculptors seem to have understood. Unlike the earlier examples of Gommaṭa at Ellora and other places, the creepers entwined round the body have been shown here with great restraint with their distinctive foliage well-spaced apart and in a way that would not detract from the majesty of the main figure itself.

The colossal statue of Gommaṭa at Sravanabelgola is the largest of its kind not only in India but in the world. This statue of Gommaṭa has been the model for all later images in India. Earlier pieces, however, show long locks of hair hanging over his shoulders, in the manner of his father Ṛṣabhanātha.

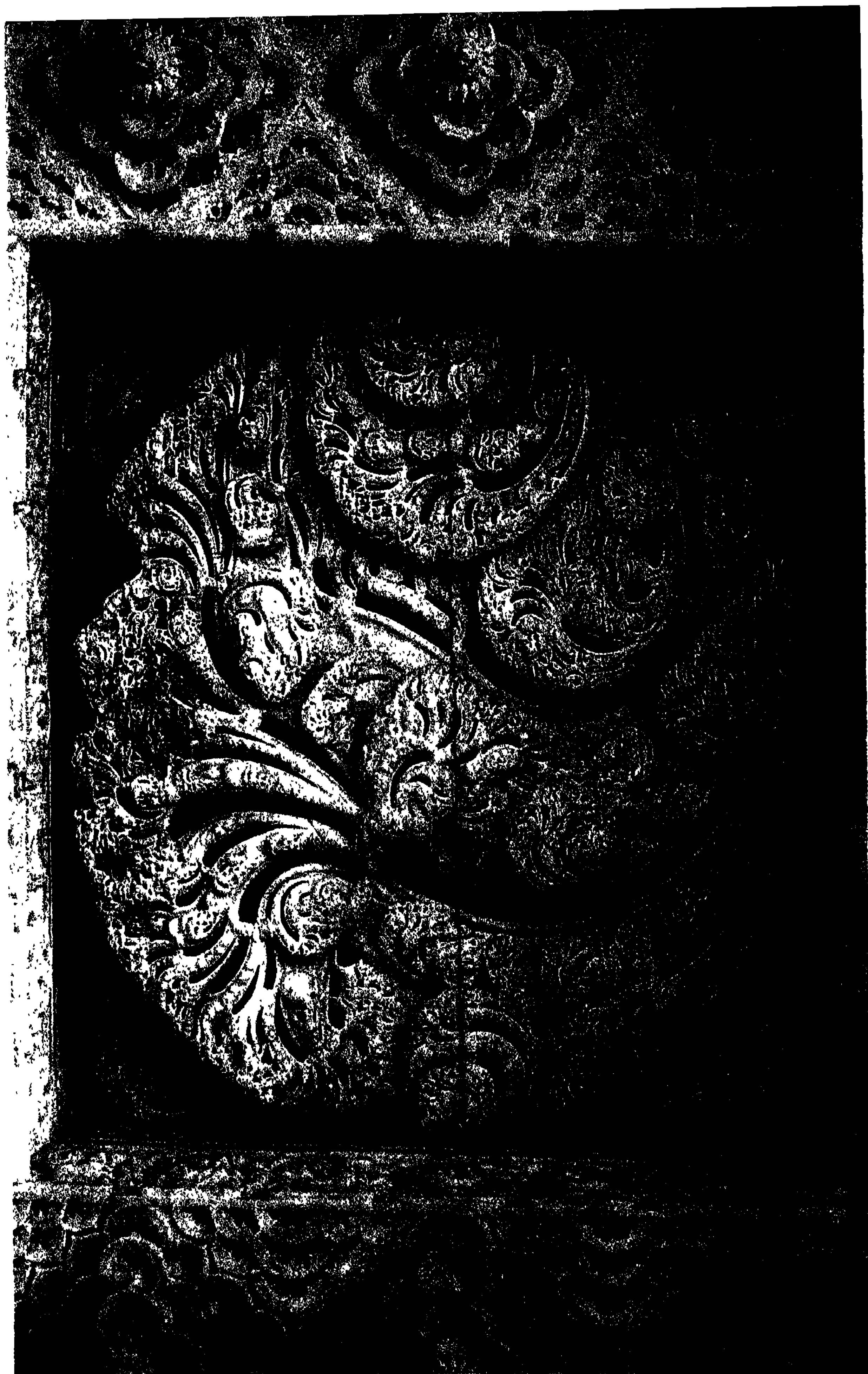
There are other Gommaṭa statues, usually on top of hills and visible from large distances. Of these, the two Gommaṭa statues, one at Karkal and the other at Venur are examples of striking artistic creations. The Gommaṭa statue at Karkal, created in 1431-32 A.D., is about 12.5 m high and is made of a solid block of gneiss. Estimated to weigh eighty tonnes, "the figure is made to lean against a slab which reaches up to its wrists. There is a round pedestal which is sunk into a thousand-petalled lotus flower. The colossus stands on a platform of stones and is surrounded by a stone railing and two laterite enclosures...The legs and arms of the figure are entwined with vines (drakśa creeper). On both sides of the feet a number of snakes are cut out of the slab against which the image leans."[5]



Sixteen *vidyādevīs* in the *raṅgamaṇḍapa* in the Vimalavasāhi temple.

Notes

1. As quoted in U.P. Shah, *Jaina-Rūpa-Maṇḍana,* p. 39.
2. As quoted by B.C. Bhattacharya, *The Jaina Iconography,* p. 137.
3. *History of Indian and Eastern Architecture,* p. 342.
4. *Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization,* p. 71.
5. For a detailed information about Gommaṭeśvara, see, *Jaina Art and Architecture,* pp. 222-234, and 340-345.



Kalpalatā — 'a creeper of wish fulfilment' — a relief on a ceiling in a bay in the *navacaukī* in the Vimalavasāhi temple. In one corner of the relief is a *vidyādhara* hovering with folded hands.

Chapter VIII

Outside In/Inside Out

Nature and the Indian Arts

> **In the art of India, every form is the symbol of a clear and conscious thought and of consciously directed feeling. Nothing is arbitrary or peculiar, nothing is vague or mysterious, for the very *raison d'etre* of all the imagery is to present concrete ideas in comprehensible and easily apprehended forms.[1]**
>
> —Coomaraswamy

In addition to the portrayal of gods and goddesses and the members of the Jain pantheon, the Vimalavasāhi and the Lunavasāhi temples have a profusion of images of animals, birds, flowers, trees, and mythic creatures. Tree worship in India has been popular from very ancient times, as is evident from Indus valley seals and from Vedic and Smriti literature. Like the importance of *bodhi* tree for the Buddhists, *caitya* tree assumed a great significance for the Jains. It is believed that Mahāvīra obtained enlightenment under *caitya-vṛkṣa*. In addition to the *caitya* tree, the 'Tree of Life' and *kalpavṛkṣa*, 'wish fulfilling tree', are also integral to Jain iconography, as they are to Hindu and Buddhist.

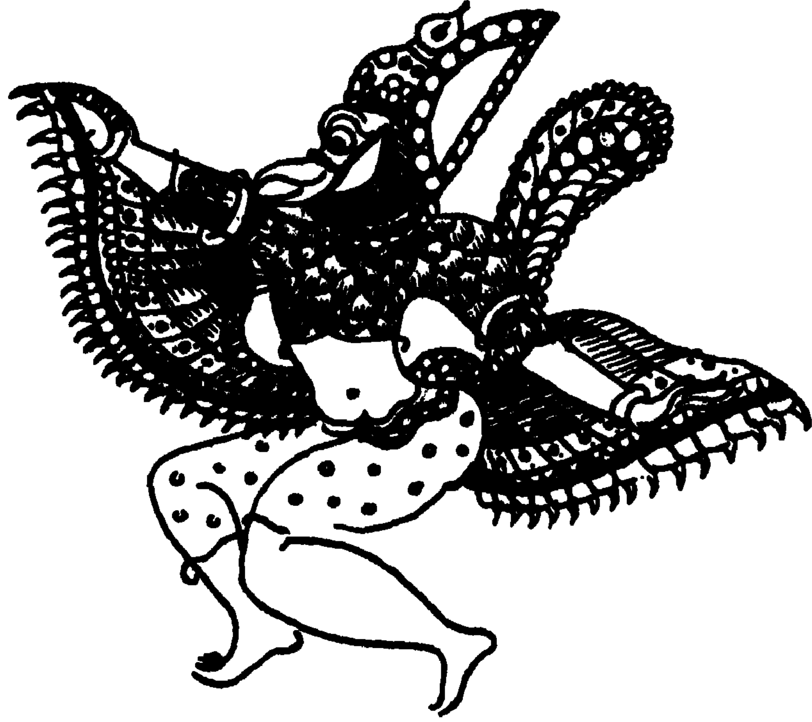
One of the most pervasive icons in Indian temples is that of *Kīrttimukha;* it is an icon that has travelled to many other lands in South and South-East Asia, including Sri Lanka, Burma, Bali, Java, Cambodia. Situated centrally in the temple, the *kīrttimukha,* 'the face of glory', is the crown or the crest jewel of architectural features like doorways, arches, *gavakshas,* lintels, etc.

The *Kīrttimukha* is a mythic figure; it is a variation on a lion's face, with boar's ears, cat's eyes, and buffalo horns. It may also have associations with *Narasiṁha,* Viṣṇu as half-lion, half-man.

The lion, as the king of the beasts, has long been the symbol of royalty; the throne on which Indian kings sat was called *siṁhāsan,* 'the seat of a lion', and had representations of lions on the base of the throne.

In the Jain *Kalpasūtras,* Mahāvīra is depicted as sitting on a lion throne in the *Pushpottara* heaven. Similarly, since the Buddha was the 'Lion of the Shākya clan', it is not unusual to see the Buddha figure with miniature lions at its feet.

The teachings of Buddha are compared to the roar of the lion which sends all other animals, the advocates of false doctrines, into hiding. His voice is the roar of the Awakened One to awaken others.



Jatayu, the valiant brid who fought against Ravana to release Sita.

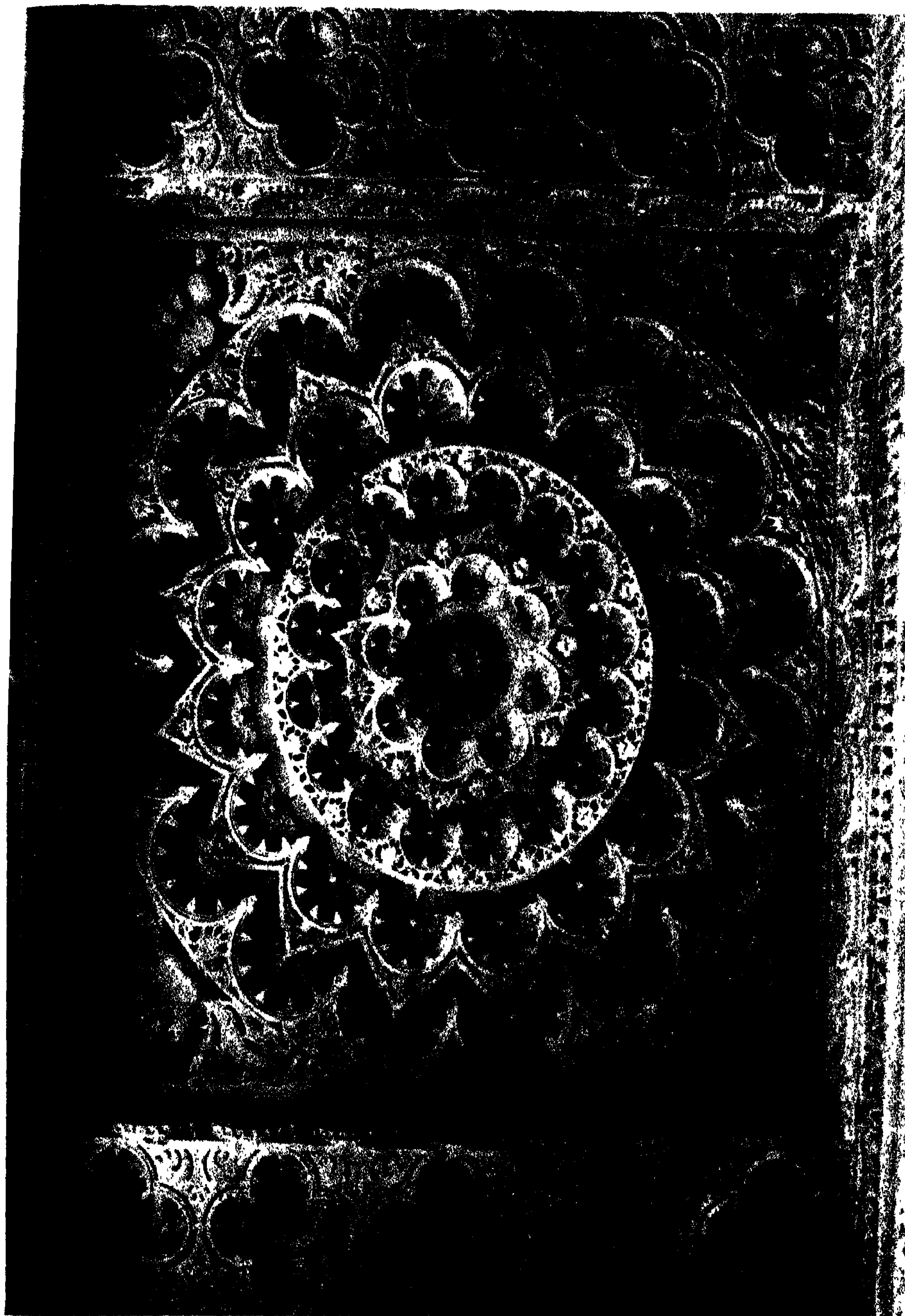
As part of temple iconography, the most pervasive mythic beast is *makara;* it has a certain resemblance to a crocodile, with some features of an elephant. It is a master of the deep, represented with wide-open jaws, studded with fierce teeth and a thick and fleshy body often covered with scales. Out of its open mouth a lotus rhizome (a symbol of the Tree of Life, of fertility and of abundance) issues with leaves, flowers and even animals and jewels.

The *makara* is the *vāhana* of Varuṇa, of Gaṅgā and of some *yakṣas* and *yakṣīs,* all figures associated with water. It is also a specific symbol of the Jain *tīrthaṅkara* Puṣupadanātha.

The *makara* occurs in *prabhāmaṇḍalas* of icons, in niches and on panels of temple walls, and sometimes in the company of *kīrttimukhas.*

The other creatures depicted are *nāgas* and *vyālas, kinnara* couples — semi-divine beings, half human half birds, elephants, horses, lions and geese. These sculptures have been employed to beautify the temples.

The *śārdūlas* or *vyālas* are fabulous beasts represented as horned lions. Executed in the round or very high relief they are generally shown at the outer flank of the pilasters of the *parikara.* The *śārdūlas* are seen on a corridor ceiling of the Vimalavasāhi.



A ceiling with four circular courses in north portico in the Lunavasāhi temple. On four corners there are figures of *kirttimukhas.*

The *nāgas* have the body of a snake and the face of a human being. They are seen on the ceilings of the Pārśvanātha temple at Kumbharia and the ceiling of the east portico of the *raṅgamaṇḍapa* of the Vimalavasāhi. In the Ādīśvara temple at Ranakpur, there are some magnificent representations of *nāgas* and *nāgiṇīs*.

Among other animals, the geese in rows appear on the pillars and ceilings, lions are shown on the ceilings and the *saṁvaraṇā*, the elephants are carved in *pīṭha*, *śikhara*, roofs, ceilings and in the *hastiśālā*. When the elephants appear on the basal



Garuḍa, 12th century, Belur.

corners of the ceiling, they are shown as a pair lustrating a lotus plant. On the *śikhara* their front part is depicted in the recesses. When they appear at the corners of the roof they are carved wholly in the round and are represented in the walking attitude. The elephants in the *hastiśālā* of the Vimalavasāhi and Lunavasāhi are executed out of huge blocks of marble, some profusely decorated with ornaments. In the Vimalavasāhi temple, ele-phants frame the stairways leading to *mukhamaṇḍapa* and the *gūḍhamaṇḍapa*.



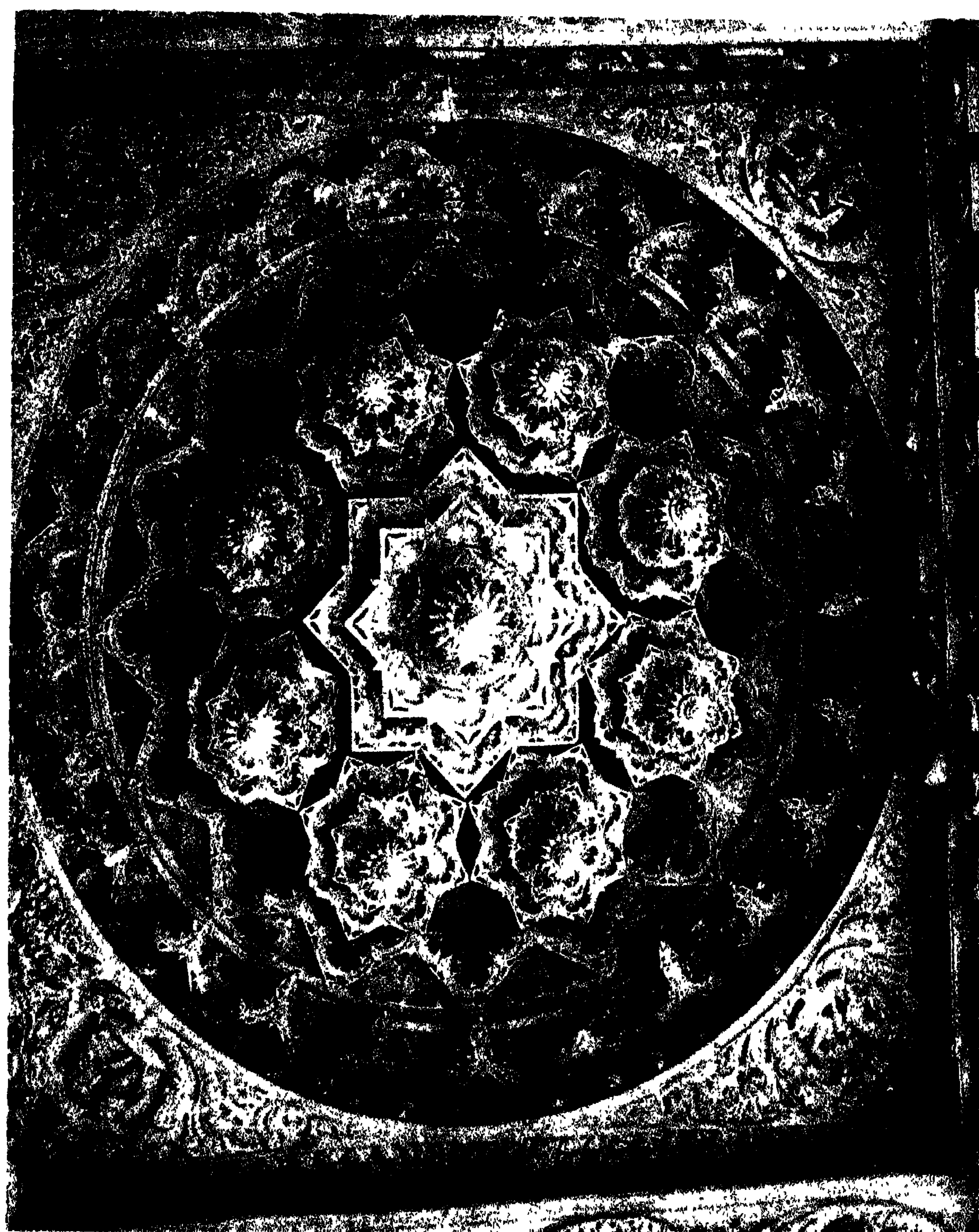
Animals, birds on the south gate, Sāñchī, 1st-2nd century B.C.

The lion figures occur in rows in ceilings, and are generally shown in profile. On the bell-roof, as in Ranakpur, they appear on the four ridges.

All of the Jain *tīrthaṅkaras* and other deities in India have almost always an animal as their mount — *vāhana*. While on one level they literally transport the gods, on another they also serve as cognizance of various *jinas* or gods, as in these images of divinities, "the simple kingly or womanly form of the anthropomorphic figure", writes Zimmer, "is somewhat ambiguous; its reference becomes specified by the determinant, or parallel symbol added underneath."[2]

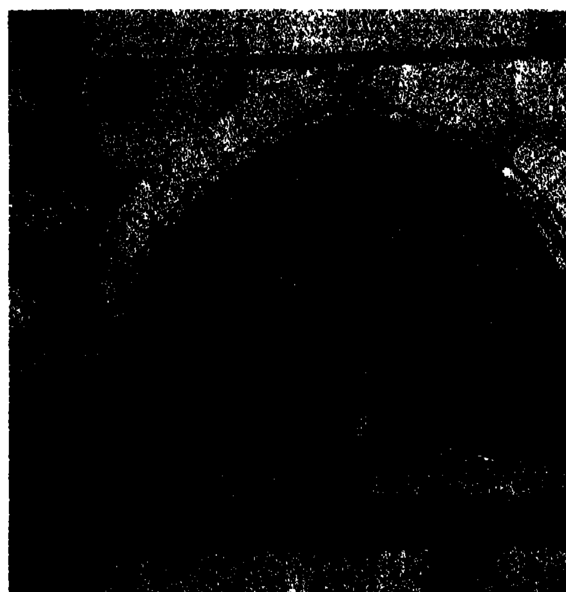
The animals may have had earlier sacred connotations separate from the gods themselves and are, in fact, their theriomorphic representations. In some ways they also represent the power and character of their divine masters. Śiva's bull, *nandinī*, is symbolic of his fertility and his association with animals; he is called *Paśūpatī*, 'the Lord of the animals'. Nandinī is also regarded as symbol of *dharma*, which is characterised as 'four-footed'. The elephant is the *vāhana* of Indra, the king of gods. As befits the king, the elephant is an appropriate royal vehicle, and it reiterates Indra's might as a warrior and his role as a provider of rains and hence life itself. The gander, *haṁsa*, is the vehicle of Sarasvatī as also of Brahma; one text informs us that the seven ganders that pull the god's chariot represent the seven worlds. The gander, like the lotus, is also the symbol of purity, as no water attaches to its back as it glides through the water. Its migratory habits also make it an ideal metaphor for the free soul, and hence all men of wisdom who have succeeded in severing the bonds of attachment are known as *paramahaṁsa*, 'the great gander'. The *vāhana* of Viṣṇu is *garuḍa*, originally a bird associated with the sun but which acquired the symbolic value of mind, for nothing is said to be faster than the mind. The *garuḍa* thus is an entirely appropriate *vāhana* for Viṣṇu, the preserver-deity, who continually roams the universe.[3] Kramrisch expresses the abundance of these symbols thus:

> "*Alles Vergangliche ist nur ein Gleichnis.* Whatever is transitory is but a symbol, be it as firm as this earth and high as is the firmament. The shape of the animal, the body of man in all its parts, and man-made objects, all these are drawn into the picture. There they form part of one composition which paints in detail, as in many configurations as inner vision dictates, the nature and myth of the god. The myths are his actions, their stage is the heart and mind (*manas*) of the singer and he draws its lineaments in the frame and the order of the cosmos which he sees and knows, in which he lives and is conscious."[4]



A ceiling in the Lunavasāhi temple with nine lotus flowers

Just as the animal kingdom has been integral to the mythic and artistic imagination in India, so has the world of vegetation — of plants, flowers, fruits, trees. The tree as a symbol of cosmic life is as ancient a motif in Indian art and sculpture as in many other cultures of the world. In India, 'The Tree of Life and Wisdom' is to be found in Hindu, Muslim, Jain and Buddhist temples engraved in stone and wood, or cast in bronze, over a period of several centuries. *Kalpavṛkṣa*, 'the tree that fulfils all wishes', along with its leaf and creeper, *kalpavallī* and *kalpalatā*,



Tree of Life, sandstone window, Sidi Sapjid's Mosque, Ahmedabad, 15th century.



Buddha with 'Wheel of Law' as a halo, Mathura, 15th century.

are carved in exquisite detail on the ceilings of Jain temples at Dilwara and Ranakpur.

Kalpavṛkṣa has been a major motif in the art and literature of India. It was believed that pots of gold and bags of precious gems lay at its roots, and it was surrounded by Seven Treasures, the conch and the lotus among them. Thus it was believed that

the tree also had the power to bestow all precious things on its worshippers.[5]

Stories about trees in India are legion; with every Jain *tīrthaṅkara*, one particular tree is associated, under which he received enlightenment. Thus trees are highly venerated amongst the Jains.

Floral, vegetal and geometrical designs are an integral part of the ornamentation in these temples. Amongst these scrolls, creepers, diamond-shaped lozenges, lotus, *campaka* and *mandāraka* flowers are most frequent. In the Lunavasāhi temple, in particular, these patterns have been employed in great abandon and have been carved with great subtlety and imagination. Some ornamentation motifs like lotus petal-and-bud and *ardhapadma* are of special significance. The former consists of pointed lotus petals alternating with stalks carrying buds. This motif occurs for the first time on the ceiling of the slab of the *gūḍhamaṇḍapa* dome of the Vimalavasāhi. Here it forms the corollas of a full-blown lotus flower. Later it occurs in the *raṅgamaṇḍapa* and the corridor ceilings of the temples Vimalavasāhi and the Lunavasāhi. In the Lunavasāhi specifically this motif is carved in the subtlest of details.

The *ardhapadma* consists of full-blown half lotus flowers set up in beaded garland loops with lotus buds as pendants. This motif is seen in the *gūḍhamaṇḍapa* dome and corridor ceilings of the Vimalavasāhi and in several ceilings of the Lunavasāhi.

Another motif is that of chain-and-bell alternating with tassels and underlined with a horizontal band adorned with leaves. It is an embellishment of the pillar-shaft and occurs from about the middle of eleventh century until about the middle of the twelfth century. It is seen in the *mukhamaṇḍapa* and the two pillars of the *raṅgamaṇḍapa* of the Vimalavasāhi. There are no examples of it in the Lunavasāhi.

In addition to the lotus, as observed earlier, the tree symbolising nature itself and the cosmic pillar, and the serpent, representing fertility and periodic renewal, are important to Hindu, Buddhist and Jain iconography.

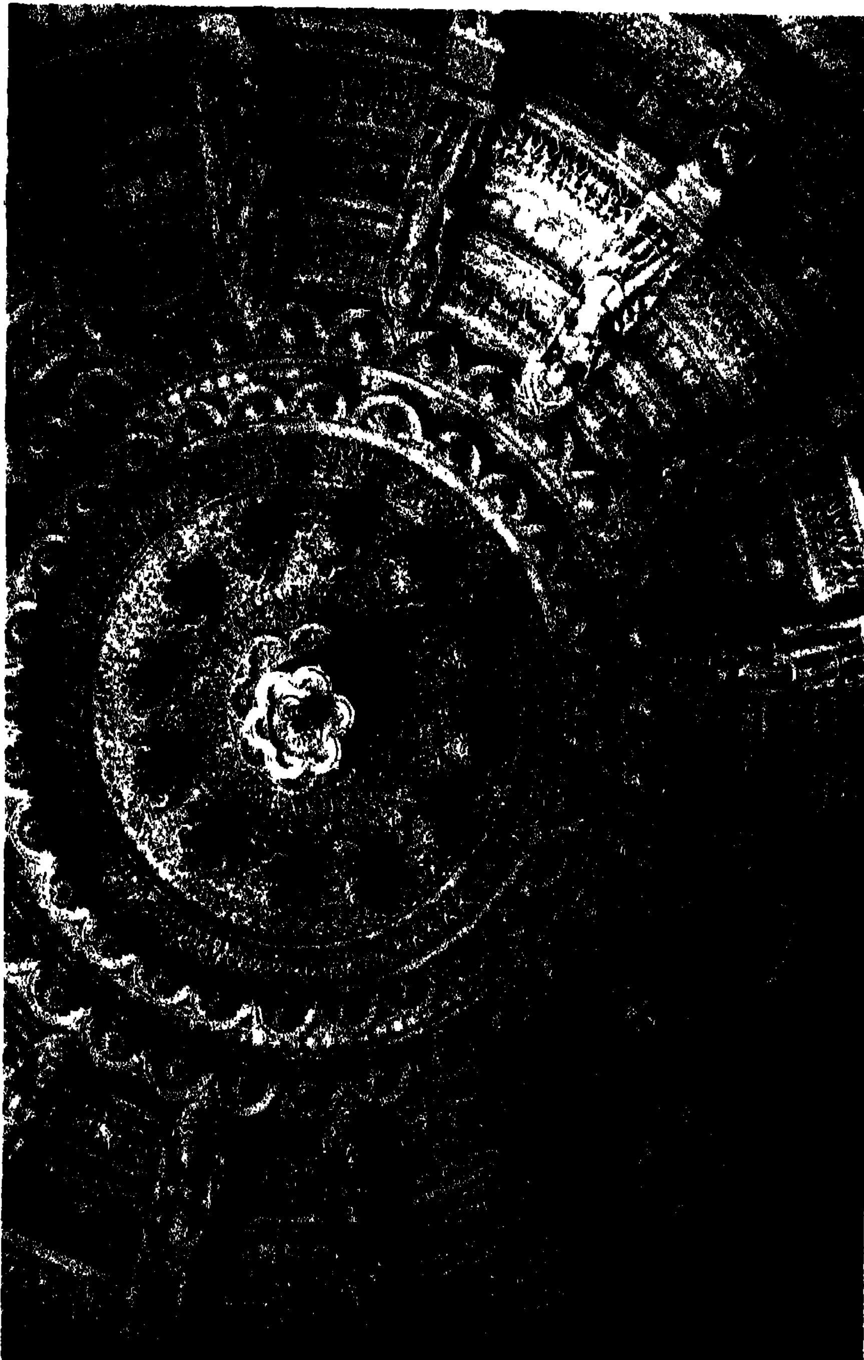
Another symbol of universal significance is the wheel, which has been variously interpreted. In Jain art it is an auspicious symbol, associated with a particular *jina* as his cognizance. Amongst Buddhists it is conspicuous and frequently used symbol of the religion itself, and the Buddha is said to have set 'the wheel of the law', *dharmacakra*, in motion when he preached his first sermon at Sarnath near Varanasi. This use of the symbol, as has been observed by Pal, was borrowed from the more ancient idea of *cakravartin*, a universal monarch, one who literally turns the wheel (*cakra*), presumably of a chariot, as he conquers the world. Alexander, Aśoka, Kanishka, and Samudragupta are such universal

monarchs.[6] Buddha's conquests, of course, were spiritual rather than mundane. Like many other emblems in early Buddhist art, the wheel symbolises the Buddha himself. Not only is the Buddha the mover of the wheel, but the wheel itself is the word set in motion, and the Buddha is the very embodiment of the word.

In Hindu art the wheel is primarily associated with the god Viṣṇu or Kṛṣṇa, who uses it chiefly as a weapon. Because the wheel is used as a metaphor for the sun in early Indian literature and because the Vedic Viṣṇu is considered to be solar deity, his wheel is generally regarded as a solar symbol. In *Mahābhārata* the wheel or disc belonged to Kṛṣṇa and was used primarily as a weapon. Its fiery rim and enormous destructive power was considered analogous to the sun, and some mythographers claimed that it was made of the eighth part of the sun's rays as were the chief weapons of the other gods, such as the trident of Śiva or the spear of Kumāra. Although a weapon in Viṣṇu's arsenal, the wheel also symbolises various other abstract concepts, such as the seasons and the times, both of which depend on the sun.

The *Viṣṇudharmottara*, after stating that "the god Viṣṇu himself is immovable and he moves the wheel", provides at least three different explanations of the wheel. It informs us: "The sun and the moon represent Puruṣa and Prakriti, which are symbolised by the wheel and the mace respectively"; elsewhere the wheel represents "the rotation of the world...The Wheel of the Law, The Wheel of Time and the circular path of the planets"; and thirdly, the wheel is said to signify air (*pavana*). Yet in another text the wheel is the "mind, whose thoughts (like the weapon) fly swifter than the winds."[7]

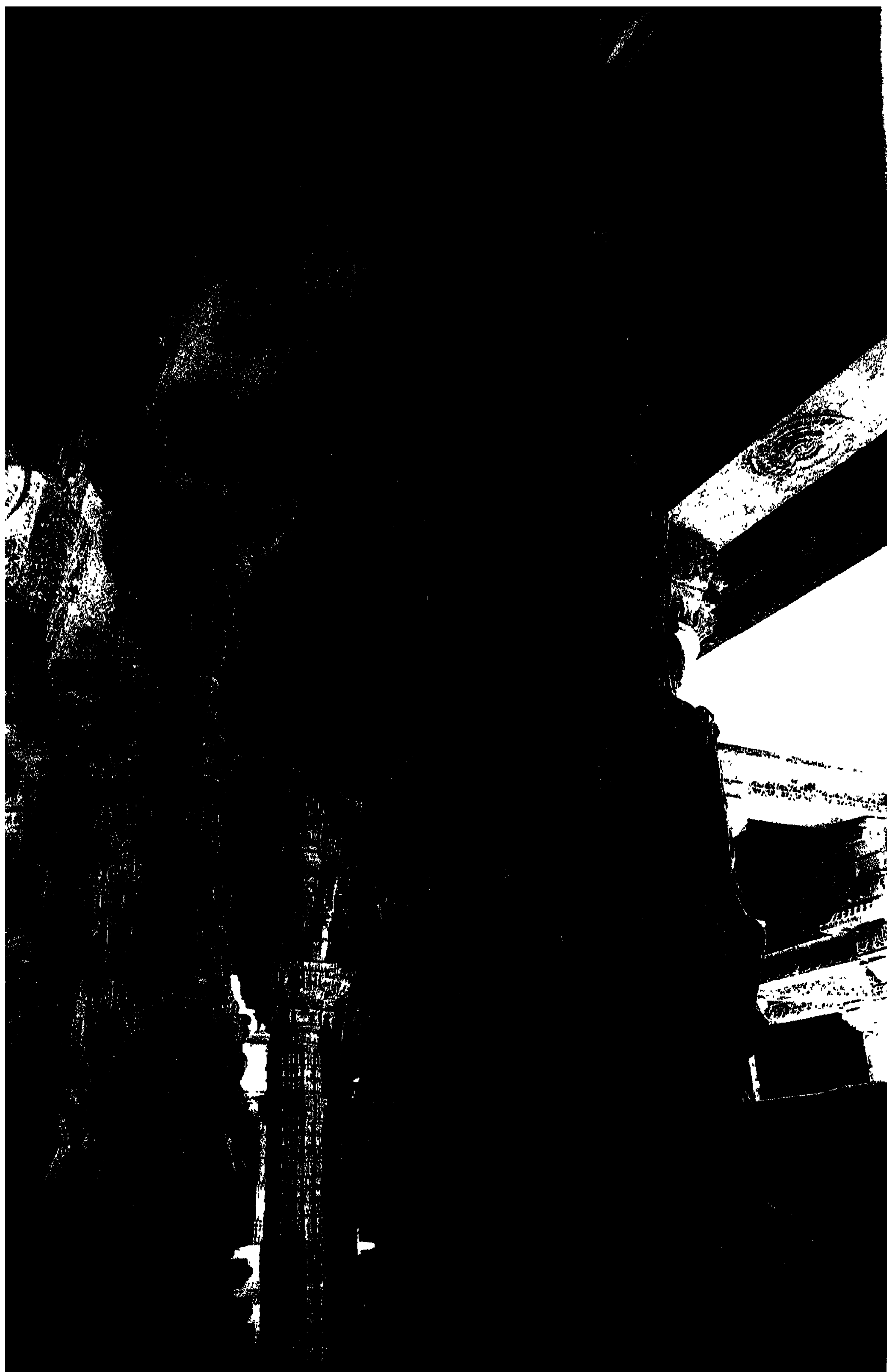
"The symbols in Indian art thus are multivalent and represent many different abstractions."[8]



Central dome in the *raṅgamaṇḍapa* in the Vimalavasāhi temple. The *raṅgamaṇḍapa* is a thirteenth century addition to the temple. Sixteen *vidyādevīs* and sixteen *vidyādharas* are part of the embellishment of the dome which is 25 ft in diameter and less than 30 ft in height, from the floor to the apex. The dome is shaped like a lotus flower and is composed of eleven circular courses and a long circular *padmaśilā*, the pendant of the lotus.

Notes

1. *Catalogue in the Indian Section in the Museum of Fine Arts,* Boston, p. 38.
2. *Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization,* p. 71.
3. For a comprehensive discussion, see Gorakshakar, S.V. Ed. *Animals in Indian Art.*
4. Miller, B.S. Ed. *Exploring India's Sacred Art,* p. 23.
5. See Fergusson, J. *Tree and Serpent Worship.*
6. *Indian Sculpture,* p. 42.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.



Chapter IX

Dance and the Temple

It is a merry-go-round. One mask, one large stone-mask behind which all faces hide....of Oedipus and Gautam, of Galileo and Milton, of Curie and Mira....and of all the men who watch the long night....all holding hands.... all, for one brief moment, seeing through the hollow eyes of the mask....and dancing.... holding hands and dancing at the still-point in the centre of the whirlpool, where there is 'no dance, and there is only the dance.'

—*The Lotus in the Stone*[1]

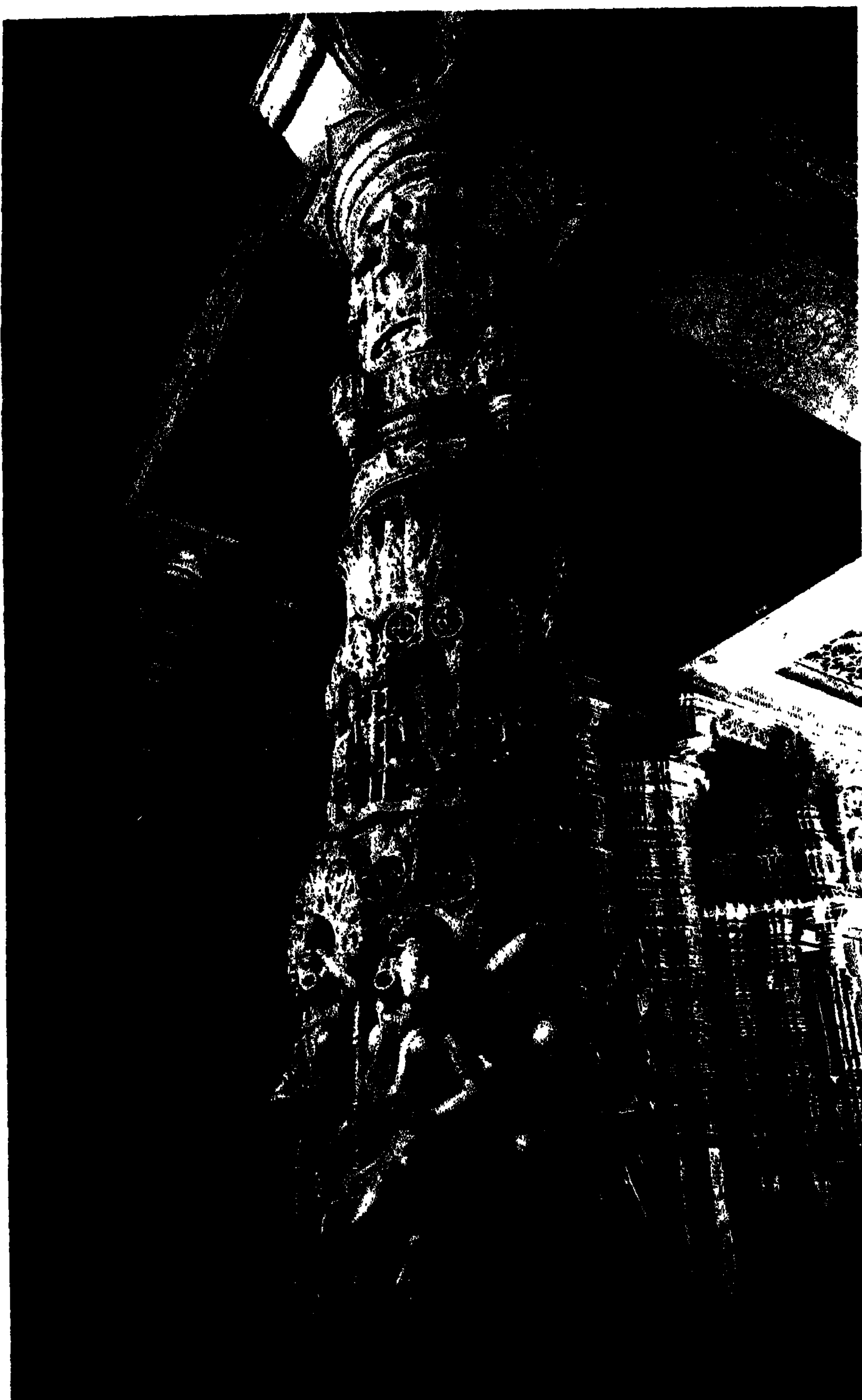
In the 13th century Lunavasāhi temple, in the *navacaukī*, just outside the sanctum sanctorum, known as *garbhagṛha*, 'the womb', there are a number of marble columns with exquisite figures of dancers. The dance style of these figures has been traced to be *Odissi*, a style that flourished largely in the state of Orissa, on the east coast of India, more than a thousand kms away. These figures are about 50 cms high, and they depict a variety of dance postures. In one figure, as part of the *hastak mudrās*, the hand of the dancer is beside the head in *ardhapatāka*, 'half flag' posture; the other hand rests by the chest. The dancer stands in the *tribhaṅga*, a triple-bend position of the body, with the right foot behind the left. As is typical of the Odissi style, the sculpture suggests how the toes of the right foot brush against the ground as it is brought to the front.

These figures all depict not a still posture of a dance, but that special state when the dance and the dancer become one; poet W.B. Yeats has expressed it thus:

O Body, swayed to music,
O quickening glance!
How can I tell the dancer
From the dance.[2]

In this temple, as a spectator, one can feel drawn into the joy and abandon of the dancers; the marble columns seem to act like lightning rods, absorbing energy from within a much wider field. Amongst these dancing figures there is one of such majesty and grandeur that one can no longer tell, as the poet suggests, 'the dancer from the dance'; she seems to be dancing and yet not dancing: a momentary, fleeting glimpse of the Lord in the *garbhagṛha* has arrested her steps; her eyes open a little wider for the *darśan* — for the divine revelation. In awe and wonder, she brings her hands together to greet. Yet the hands barely touch; the dance and

On page 166
A column with images of dancers, the Lunavasāhi temple.



A column with images of dancers, the Lunavasāhi temple.

its momentum are all-absorbing, perhaps inspired by the *darśan*, perhaps celebrating it, suggesting that 'there is no dance, but only the dance'.[3]

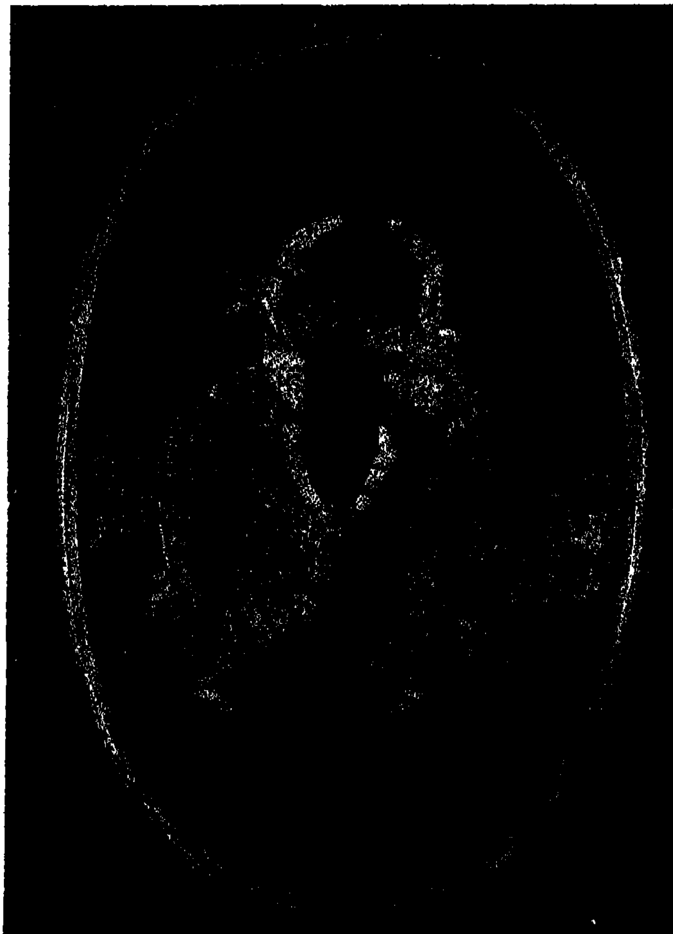
This 'moment of being' for the dancer, the glimpse, the coy acknowledgement, the thrust for continuity, the inevitable desire to go on and on, to fulfil some special journey, are in existence, not only in human drama and its creations but tortuous in all of nature: they mark the bend in the road; they are the 'turning points' on the long and hazardous path; this is where one turns, and from where one returns, to assume the pilgrimage.

Dance as an artistic motif has been used in all cultures, yet none has visualised its supreme gods and goddesses as dancers. In India one cannot conceive the cosmos without Śiva the *Naṭarāja*, 'the Lord of Dance' and Kṛṣṇa the *Naṭavara*, 'the dancer'.

There is a story about the great French artist Henri Matisse and his design of the Chapel of the Rosary of the Dominican Nuns of Venice, consecrated in June 1951. A year earlier, in 1950, Matisse was invited to exhibit in Paris at the Maison de la Pensee Francaise, a place considered by many as a Communist cultural centre. To the obvious chagrin of the organisers, Matisse had in-



Naṭarāja, Kangra, 18th century.
Courtesy: Allahabad Museum.



Two Manipuri dancers dancing in an egg-like form.

sisted that his exhibition must include the design of the chapel. On seeing the models of the chapel, the Communist poet Louis Aragon is said to have remarked to Matisse: 'Very pretty, very gay — in fact, when we take over we'll turn it into a dance hall.'[4]

Aragon obviously didn't know that there had been in fact a long tradition of a dance hall as part of the temple architecture in India. *Raṅgamaṇḍapa,* hall of celebrations and dance, is an integral part of the Vimalavasāhi and Lunavasāhi temples at Mount Abu, as it is of many other temples all across the country. The old tradition of dance performances in these halls is no more, but many a temple is now used as locale and background for dance festivals.



Naṭarāja, Bronze, Chola, 11th century. Courtesy: National Museum, New Delhi.

The use of dancing figures as an integral part of temple architecture, art and iconography has flourished for well over two thousand years in every region of the Indian subcontinent. These figures, however, are not always 'religious' in the sense of being part of a religious ritual or worship; some of them are in fact part of an earthly celebration, whether in a court or at a harvest. Until recently, the epigraphical and literary references in India have

made little distinction between the secular and the sacred life; the ordinary, everyday life had always been regulated and guided by religious ritual and thought. Thus representation of dance in Indian art and architecture encompassed all aspects of life. "Where artistic, social, and religious life are integral parts of a ritualistic culture", Richard Lannoy writes, "temple art reflects the desire to escape from the anguish of life in time....Efforts to maintain a state of exaltation among the worshippers lead to the glorification of the temple dance as the principal form of the sculptural decoration....Rows of images are portrayed in the poses of the classical dance; the geometry of motion animates all surface decoration with pulsating rhythm. The ecstatic dance of religious possession gives formal shape to the law of internal and unarrested circulation, the life urge, irrepressible as the beating heart, the pounding blood."[5]

Basic to the Indian aesthetic tradition is the close relationship between the visual and the performing arts, particularly dance and drama. The classical dances, Bhāratanāṭyam and Kathākali, have had great influence on sculpture. Not only did the sculptors borrow specific themes from the dancer's repertoire, but the underlying rhythm in Indian sculptural form, as Pal has observed eloquently, is essentially similar to the dancer's rhythm.



Sixteen *vidyādharas* in the *raṅgamaṇḍapa* in the Lunavasāhi temple. They are playing different musical instruments.

The postures and gestures of the fingers, whether mortal or divine, are closely related to those used in the dance and they often have the same theatrical effect. This is hardly surprising in view of the advice constantly repeated in texts on aesthetics that before artists can be successful they must thoroughly study both dance and drama. This is clearly stated in the following dialogue between Vajra, the interlocutor, and the sage Mārkaṇḍeya in the *Viṣṇudharmottara*:

> Vajra: O sinless one, how should I make the forms of gods so that the image made according to the rules may always manifest the Ideity?
>
> Mārkaṇḍeya: He who does not know the canon of painting, *citrasūtram*, can never know the canon of image-making, *pratimā lakṣaṇam*.

Vajra then requests Mārkaṇḍeya to teach him the art of painting, but the sage replies, that it is very difficult to know the canon of painting without the canon of dance, because "O king, in both the world is to be represented."[6]

For the architect and the sculptor of an Indian temple thus it was imperative to know in detail the intricacies of Indian dance forms; over the centuries, in fact, the columns, ceilings and walls of great temples of India have come to be regarded as precious repositories not only of Indian myths and icons but also of dances. The Indian dances, in turn, particularly, in their classical forms — Bhāratanāṭyam, Odissi, Kathak, Kathākali, Manipuri — encom-

Sixteen *vidyādharas* in the *raṅgamaṇḍapa* in the Lunavasāhi temple. They are playing different musical instruments (Close-up of col. picture of page 27).



passed deep and abiding ideals of Indian philosophy and aesthetics; in their dramatic expositions they became expressions of religious myths and legends, and abstract ideas. Though in traditional Indian culture dance permeated all facets of life, its most outstanding function has been to give symbolic expression to religious life with its rituals and ceremonies, gods and goddesses, and spiritual aspirations and ecstasies. The Indian gods too became dancers: in the dancing figures of Śiva as *Naṭarāja*, 'the king of dancers', the universe became a manifestation of a cosmic dance; in the *rās-līlā* of Kṛṣṇa, every person yearning for a spiritual union became a *gopī*, a milkmaid, churning the 'milk of existence' for butter; Kṛṣṇa is known as *mākhan-chor* — 'the butter thief'.

During the Buddhist period, from 500 B.C. to 600 A.D., and during the Classical Age, from 2nd century A.D. to the 8th century A.D., there are numerous examples of exquisite sculptures and frescoes depicting dancers in myriad ceremonies, myths and legends.

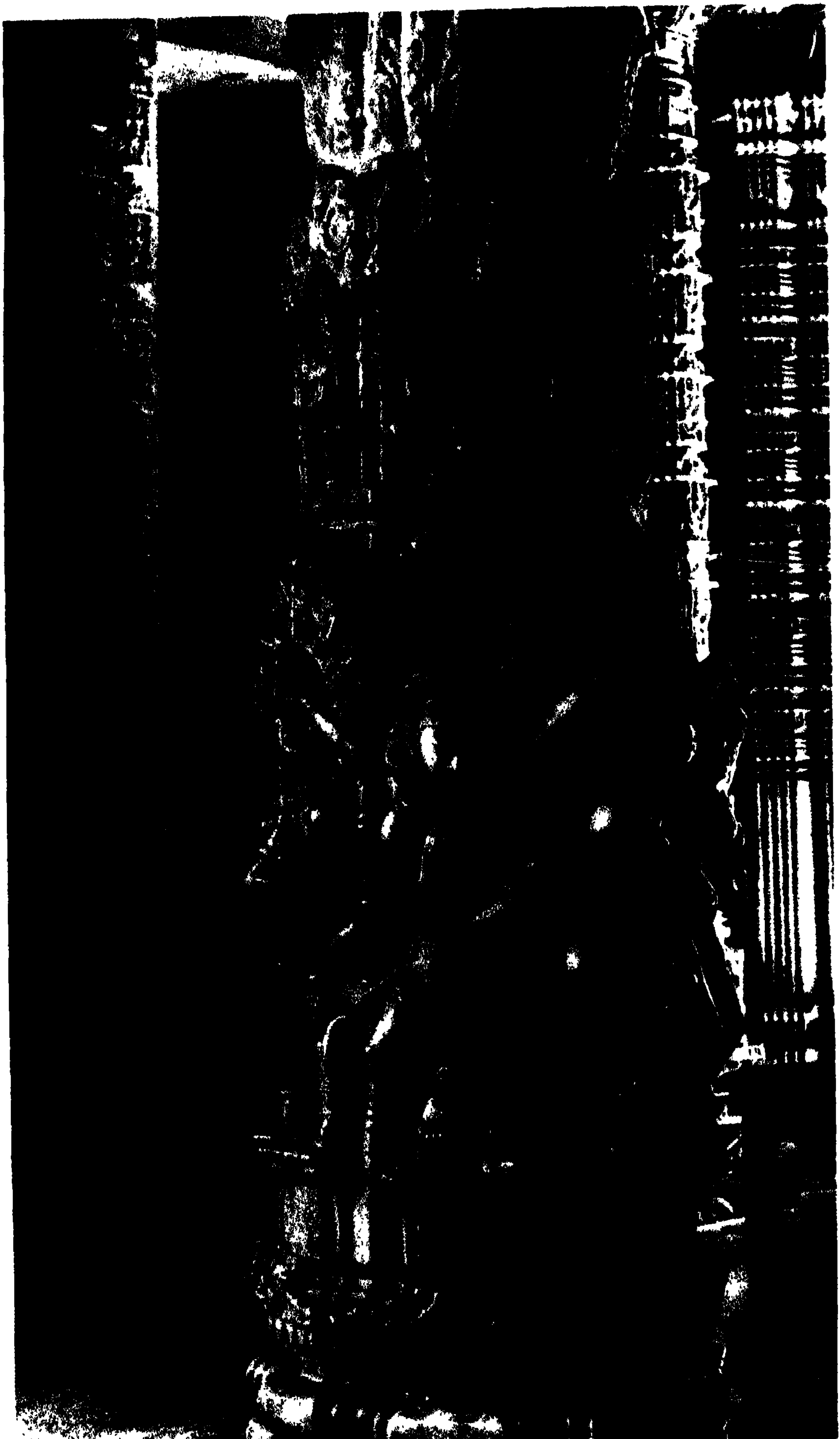
At the cave temples at Bharhut, 2nd century B.C., one sees many sculptures on the columns showing dancing figures. One column, in particular, is unique; it shows the legend of peacock dancing proudly his vainglorious dance which eventually lost him the hand of the Swan King's beautiful daughter.

In the state of Andhra Pradesh, at Amaravati, 3rd-4th century A.D., there are delicately executed dancing *Apsarās*, heavenly nymphs, performing gracefully in the Royal Court.

At Khandagiri and Udayagiri caves in the state of Orissa, first century B.C., both the friezes and bas-reliefs depict not only a series of dancers in graceful poses, but also men and women dancers making offerings to the Jain shrine. In Buddhist, Jain and Hindu sculptural art, dancing *Apsarās* often serve as embodiment of feminine beauty without any earthly encumbrances.

Śiva, part of the Hindu Trinity, is possibly the most worshipped of gods on the Indian subcontinent. Śiva is known as *Naṭarāja*, 'the lord of dance'; it is as Naṭarāja that Śiva is most worshipped, and he is often thought to be the creator of dance as an art form. The images of Śiva as Naṭarāja abound in Indian temples all across the country. The elaborate iconography of these images, and their symbolic significance have been extensively studied by many art historians.

The mythology of Śiva is full of references to his different dances. There are many features that are characteristic of Naṭarājas: *Ardhanārīśvara*, Śiva as half-man, half-woman; *Kalārimūrti*, Śiva dancing on the figure of death; *Gajāsurasaṁhāramūrti*, Śiva dancing on an elephant hide or head; *Tripurantaka*, Śiva wielding the bow and sometimes shooting an arrow; *Bhiksatana*, emaciated fig-



A column in the *navacaukī* in the Lunavasāhi temple with dancing figures.

ure of Śiva carrying a begging bowl; *Vīrabhadra*, Śiva dancing with Satī, his dead wife on his shoulders; *Vīṇādhara*, Śiva holding a *vīṇā*, *Bhairava*, Śiva carrying a club surmounted by a skull.

The most widely known representation of Śiva as Naṭarāja is one with his left leg lifted up and across the body; it has been called one of the 'most beautiful iconic concepts'[7] in the world. This representation of Naṭarāja has been the subject of many learned interpretations. One specially important theme for Bhārat Nāṭyam is Naṭarāja's *Ānanda Tāṇḍava*, 'the dance of ecstasy'. For many this is the typical form of Naṭarāja; this is what is often shown in bronzes. Naṭarāja has four arms, the two main or foremost pair of hands in *gajahasta*, elephant-like hand gestures, and *abhayamudrā*, fearlessness; the other two hands hold the fire and the *ḍamarū*. It is in this form that Śiva is the presiding deity at the great temple at Chidambaram. It was in temples like these in southern India that the dance style Bhārata nāṭyam originated.

For his consort Pārvatī in the Himalayas, Śiva also dances *Saṅdhyā Tāṇḍava*, twilight dance. Like *Saṅdhyā bhāśā*, 'twilight language' the language that mediates, like twilight, between light and darkness, revealing the reality behind the 'veil of māyā', Saṅdhyā Tāṇḍava depicts Śiva surrounded by his family and dancing with a sense of gay abandon, creating a sense of true movement. This dance is a favourite theme of many *Pahāṛi* miniatures in the Himalayas.



Close-up of picture on page 130.

The Indian dances, and the social and cultural ethos associated with the dancers and the profession of dance have evolved greatly over the centuries. Bhāratanāṭyam, the most renowned of Indian classical dances, was traditionally performed by a caste of female dancers; in the great temple cities of south India, it constituted a normal part of a daily ritual. It was also performed in



A column in the *navacaukī* in the Lunavasāhi temple with dancing figures.

the courts as well as during festivals, religious and secular alike. The dancers were mostly girls and they were known as *devadāsīs,* 'servants of god'. All temples, in south India in particular, had devadāsīs as part of its regular staff. For devadāsīs dancing was a natural and fundamental condition of existence. A story from *Rājataraṅgiṇī* illustrates this poetically:

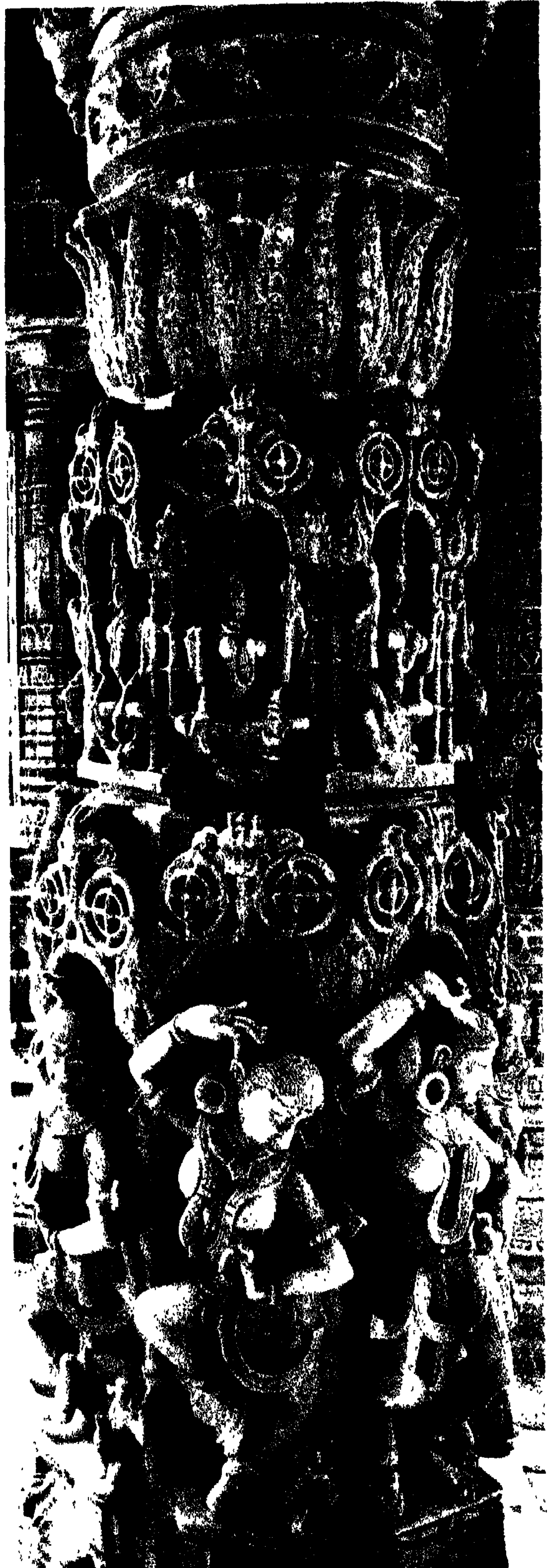
Once a king took out by himself an untrained horse into a wasteland in order to break it in. There, far away from men, he saw one maid of lovely form singing and another dancing. He observed that they came to the same spot several days later so he came up and questioned them. They told him: "We are dancing girls belonging to a temple....By the directions of our mothers, who got their living here, we dance at this spot....This custom handed down by tradition has become fixed in our family. Its reason we cannot know nor anyone else."

Later the king has the spot excavated and an old temple is discovered.[8]

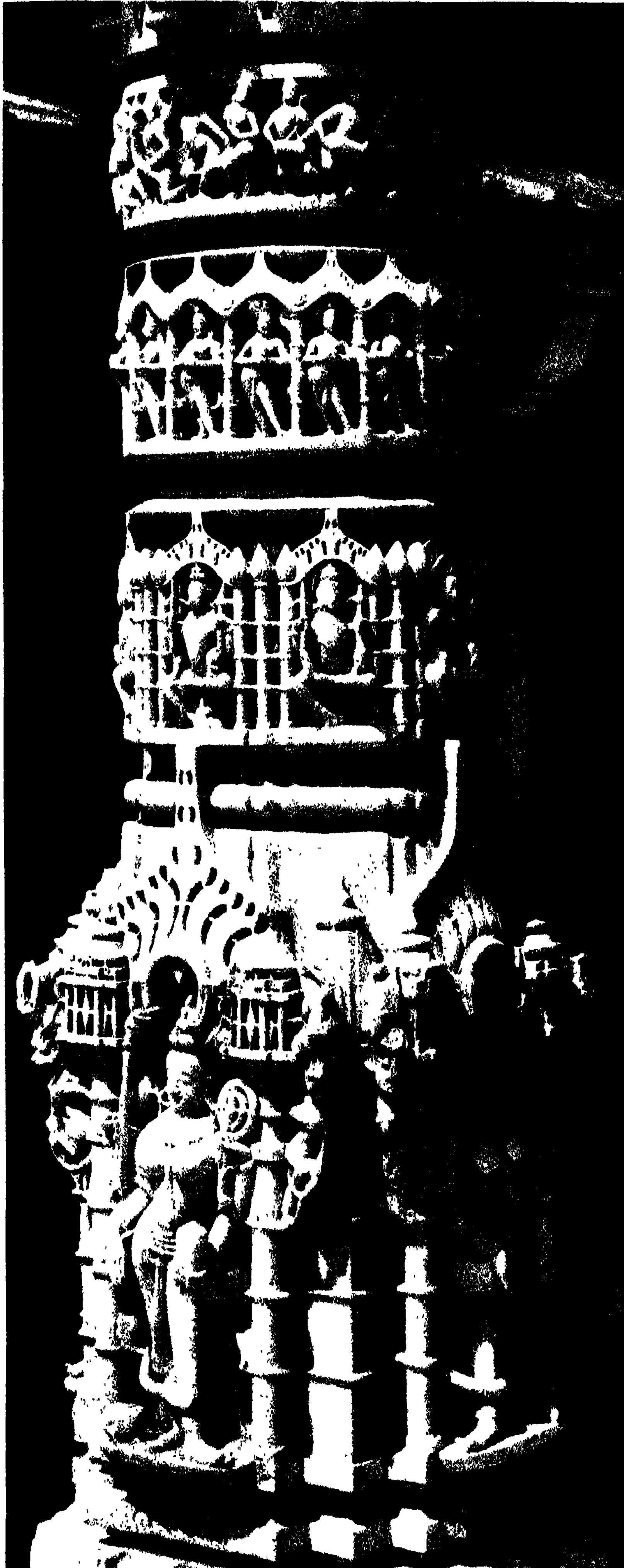
It is significant to note that dance was considered important enough to become the *dharma,* a social duty, of certain castes. Thus regarded a craft and art to be studied and mastered, it generated its own rules and regulations, and a system. The complex, and the convoluted institution of *devadāsīs* lasted hundreds of years right into the twentieth century, carrying with it riches of dance but a social stigma for dancers and the profession of dancing.[9]

Dancers and musicians, 12th century, Keśava temple, Somnathpur.

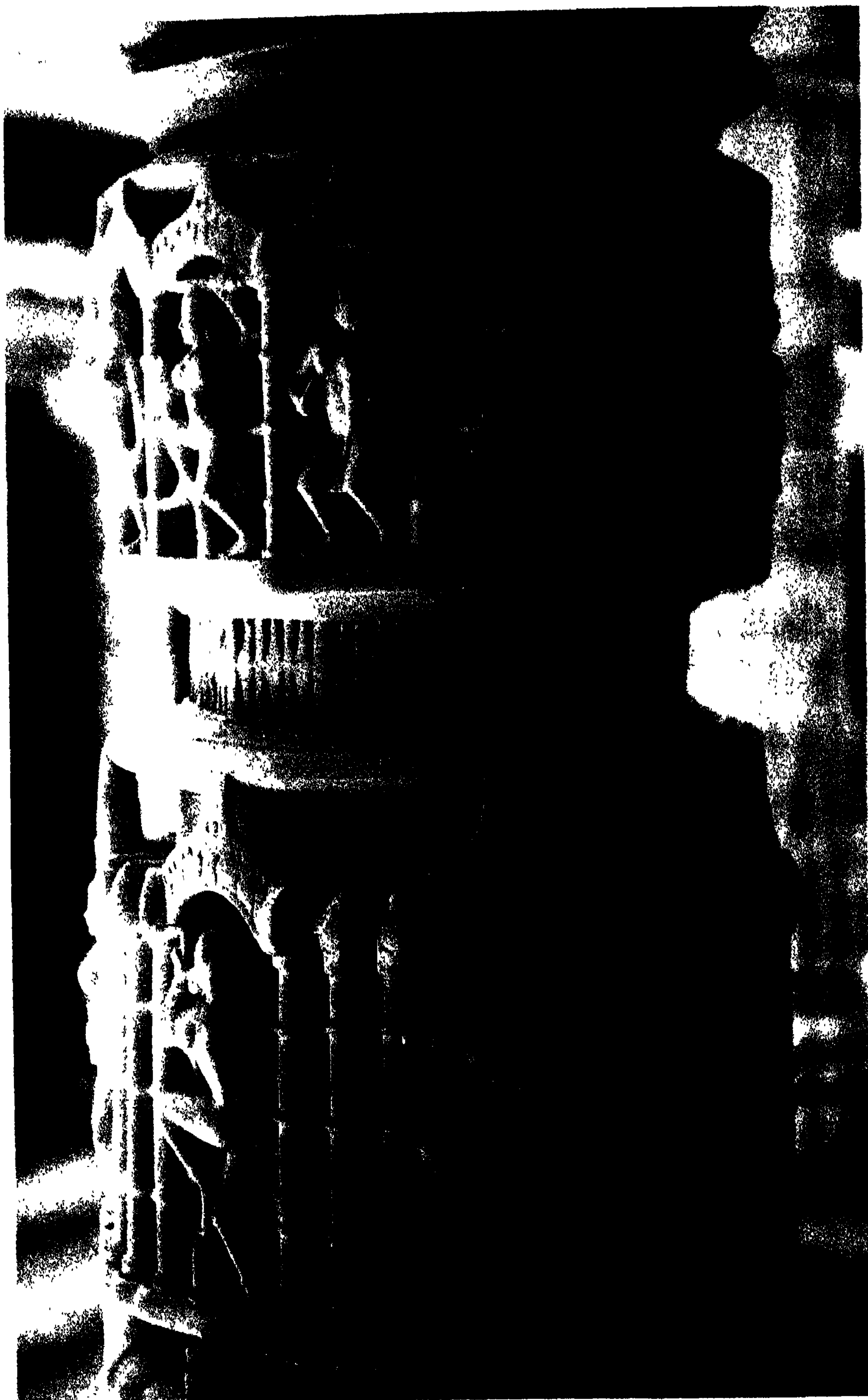




An image of jina in *khattaka* in *mukhamaṇḍapa* in the Lunavasāhi temple, with dancers on columns (Close-up of picture on of page 10).



A pillar in the *mukha-mandapa* in the Lunavasāhi temple, with figures of *yakṣīs*, musicians and dancers

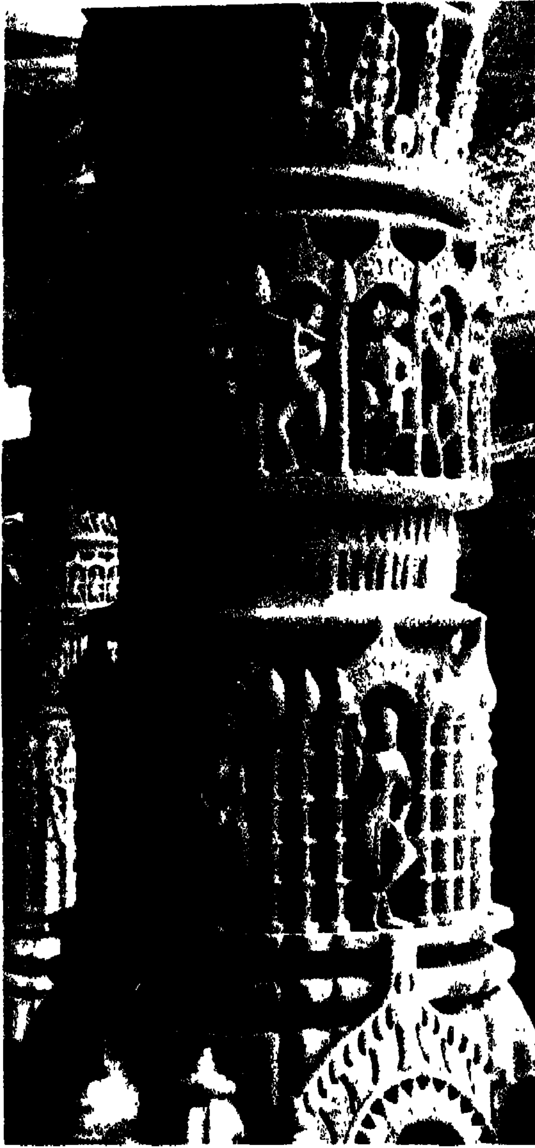


Columns in the *navacaukī* in the Vimalavasāhi temple.



Columns in the *navacaukī* in the Vimalavasāhi temple.

The simplest combinations of dance movement discussed in the *Nāṭya Śāstra,* the ancient treatise on Indian dance, are *karanas;* they define aesthetically pleasing movements of hands and feet in dance. One hundred and eight such *karanas* are described in the treatise. The depiction of these *karanas* in temples is believed to go back to eighth century during the time of Dantivarman Pallava. However, the earliest carvings of eighty-one *karanas* still intact in south India are inside the main shrine of the Bṛhadīśvara temple at Tanjore (985-1014 A.D.).



A pillar in the *mukhamaṇḍapa* in the Lunavasāhi temple, with figures of musicians and dancers.



A column in the *navacaukī* in the Lunavasāhi temple with images of dancers.

The four *gopuras* of Chidambaram temple, built from 12-16th century, have the most elaborate depiction of *karanas*. These depictions, in turn, are believed to have served as sources for similar depiction in other temples: Vṛddhagirīśvara temple at Vṛddhachalam, the Arunachaleśvara temple at Truvannmalai, the *Sarangapani* temple at Kumbakonam. It has been suggested that these *karanas*, and also the dancing figures carved on the frieze of the 14th century Devi shrine, demonstrate that the sculptors were familiar with the *Nāṭya Śāstra*, and the *Śilpa Śāstras*, as well as the actual dance.[10]

Over the centuries, the Bhāratanāṭyam, as practised today, has changed considerably from the earlier *karanas* depicted in the temples. However, *karaṇas* showing Odissi style depicted in the



Raṅgamaṇḍapa or the *Nāṭyamaṇḍapa*, 'the hall of dance', in the 13th century Sun Temple at Konark in Orissa still reflect the dance form as practised at present. The principal characteristics of both dance forms, Bhāratanāṭyam and Odissi, have in fact been well maintained over the past two thousand years.[11] This steadfastness in style may be due in large measure to the authority of the treatises such as *Nāṭya Śāstra* and *Abhinayadarpana* which laid down very precise instructions for the conduct of the dance. The foundations of Indian dance movements rest on the descriptions of the *karanas* in these texts, and illustrations of these in sculpture occur on a number of major temples dating back to at least the 11th century A.D.[12]

Though Śiva as Naṭarāja and Kṛṣṇa, the flute player and the beloved of the *gopīs*, are the two most popular motifs for dance sculptures in the Hindu temple, other gods and goddesses too have been on occasion depicted as dancers. The twelfth century Hoysala temples at Belur and Halebid have some of the most exquisite figures of dancers in all of Asian art. Here Sarasvatī, dances with a grace that is her own; goddesses Kālī and Durgā too dance. Even Gaṇeśa dances. In one myth depicted here Viṣṇu takes the form of the enchantress Mohini, and dances a special dance to destroy the demon Asura Bhasmāsura. According to the legend, this demon had been bestowed with power to destroy anyone upon whom he held his magical hand. He thus caused havoc in the whole world. In order to control him, Mohini lures him into a dance contest, and then suddenly assumes a posture in which she holds her hand over her head. In his wild frenzy, the demon imitates her and thus brings destruction to himself as he places his own hand over his head.

Dance as an expression of joy, spiritual and sensuous alike, and of celebration of life and nature have been themes depicted with same consummate skill in bronzes and paintings as in stone sculptures in temples. Artists in south India in particular excelled in creating bronzes of extraordinary grandeur; between the 9th and



the 13th centuries, during Chola period, bronzes as large as two metres high of Naṭarāja dancing his cosmic dance or Kṛṣṇa dancing the *tāṇḍava* on the hood of hundred-headed serpent Kāliya, were favourite subjects for the artists. At a number of great temples of south India — the Bṛhadīśvara temple at Tanjore, the Śiva temple at Kanchipuram, the Naṭarāja temple at Chidambaram, the Meenakshi Sundaram temple at Madurai — one sees bronzes of Śiva as Naṭarāja. There are also many such bronzes in several museums in India.

In some ways there is hardly any material — wood, ivory, terracotta, clay, sandalwood — which the Indian artist has not explored to create works of subtle and classic beauty; in all these materials, more than anything else, the dance and the dancing figures have been the most abiding and endearing theme of artistic creation.

Even in textile, specially in the states of Rajasthan, Andhra, Assam and Bengal, colourful and elaborate prints depicting folk dances, and the dances of Kṛṣṇa with *gopīs* are popular motifs.

The impulse to adore and decorate the *pratimā*, idols of *devīs* and *devatās* as a form of worship and *bhakti* is very deep rooted in the Indian psyche. This impulse has found profuse expression in the Indian sculpture, specifically as part of temple architecture. But also in frescoes and paintings. There, though always highly disciplined and modulated, this impulse has gone wild. Subtle and strong colours — in garments and jewellery, in flowers and birds, amongst lotuses and peacocks — add new and captivating dimensions to the dancing figures, expressing an all-pervading sense of joy, *ānanda*.

An outstanding dance theme is to be seen in a 7th century fresco painting in Cave 1 at Ajanta. The story is from Mahajanaka



A ceiling in the *navacaukī* in the Lunavasāhi temple.

Jataka depicting a temptation scene. It shows women musicians with tapering flutes and a dancer in rhythmic movement. The dancer's chin is slightly tilted, her head is bent graciously: her right arm is curved and the wrist is twisted; the left arm is also curved and the two arms form a movement of entwining tendrils, indicating enticement. The wrists are turned back, with the position of the fingers in the gesture of holding a flower. This is *Lasya* dance, slow and sensuous.

On the ceiling of the Kailāśa temple at Ellora is depicted Śiva's *tāṇḍava* dance. Śiva dances with his upraised foot; in his hands he holds the trident, the drum, the skull, and the bowl of renunciation. In this fresco painting, line and balance of figure are perfectly obtained with the additional beauty of colour.

Again, in the 11th century Bṛhadīśvara temple at Tanjore, there is a fresco of dancing Apsarās and musicians. Half hidden behind the clouds, the dancers shower lotus petals on the spectators at they dance. Their arms are bent and raised in statuesque poses, their figures show exotic movements of heavenly beings. As another example of *Lasya* dance, the dancers here alluringly hold lotus blossoms in their hands. In this temple there are two panels which describe in rich and pure colour tones two of Śiva's dances: one shows the whirling figure of Naṭarāja with the sacred fire in his upraised hand; Śiva here is the source of all movement, rhythm and harmony in the universe. The second panel shows Śiva's *Bhairava nṛtya'*; according to the myth, Śiva performed this dance when *asuras* attacked the city of Tripura and were finally destroyed by the gods. It is one of the finest achievements in the art of fresco painting.



A painted danseuse in a Jain cave temple at Sittanvasal, A.D. 670 [After Sivaramamurti].



A painted royal couple in a Jain cave temple at Sittanvasal A.D. 670 [After Sivaramamurti].

From early 16th century to the middle of 19th century, in many parts of Rajasthan and in some parts of the Himalayas, there flourished a special painting known as Miniature painting. These small paintings have now come to represent some of the finest achievements in Indian artistic creation. The themes in these paintings are varied but there are innumerable examples of representation of both music and dance.

Several series of *Rāgas* and *Rāginīs* have been most magnificently executed representing these melodic themes in Indian classical music. A *Rāga* is the traditional melody in which the Indian musician weaves his improvisations, and it is a selection of five, six or seven notes distributed along the scale, each *Rāga* symbolizing in rhythmic form some emotion, elemental force or particular aspect of nature when it may be most appropriately sung or played. The *Rāginī* is the feminine form of the *Rāga;* it suggests a condensation of the main theme of the melody. These Rāgas and Rāginīs, in turn, are employed as integral elements in the depiction of dances in these paintings. Some of these paintings show Śiva as Naṭarāja, but principally they focus on Kṛṣṇa and his dances and dalliance with his beloved Rādhā and other *gopīs* on the banks of river Jamuna.[13]





The expression of *bhāva*, feelings and emotions, for worship and spiritual endearment through dance has had a long tradition even before the 7th century, much earlier than the construction of the great temples of southern India. The devotional songs and dances of *Nayanmars* like Appar in Tamil Nadu, and of *bhaktas* like Mira, Chaitanya, Vidyapati, Chandidas, Vallabha, Jayadeva and Kabir in north India, are exquisite testimonies to dance as the most primary expression of joy. For Appar, 'the whole world seemed to dance and sing and play.' For Kabir, 'Dance, my heart! Dance today with joy. Mad with joy, life and death dance to the rhythms of this music. The hills and the sea and the earth dance....'[14]

This kind of mystical poetry, emerging out of *bhakti* tradition in India became the source of inspiration for all arts — music, painting, dance, drama. Within the framework of their own aesthetic constructs, artists in all these forms expressed and interpreted the same spiritual ideas and feelings.[15] This intimate connection between the arts extended over many centuries and over a vast geographical region. It was guided by spiritual experience, thought, and myth, and it was a remarkable cultural phenomenon and artistic achievement. Until this century, as arts, both music and dance have been ephemeral; we know of them only through secondary references, in paintings, sculpture or poetry. In India, these have been indeed rich sources for our understanding of the ubiquitous presence of dance in Indian life, secular and spiritual alike. With Indian gods dancing the dances of love and joy, fury and seduction, and triumph and invocation, the sanctity of dance, not only as a form of art but as a way of life, is established again and again. The *Kṛṣṇa līlā* — the cosmic story of Kṛṣṇa, speaks of 'the union of love and renunciation in life, and the secret of limitless life in this world' through every possible art form and expression.[16]

In all these expressions there is a sense of celebration of life in its myriad forms; there is no hint of any life-denying art or spirituality, or of such stultifying elitism that creates 'artificial productions, written in the closet by learned men for learned men ....they [the *bhakti* poets] have remained living voices in the people's hearts, because they appealed to the sense of the true and the beautiful.'[17]

What makes these works of art so extraordinary is their capacity to invoke the beauty and the splendour of the world of senses as well as the drama of the spirit within. The dance of Śiva, we are reminded again and again, is being performed eternally in our own hearts and souls: "The Holy Land is the land of our own experience. All is in all: and if beauty is not apparent to us in the well-known, we shall not find it in things that are strange and far away."[18]

Kabir says it in words that never cease to be true:

The musk
Is held in its pod.
Yet oblivious
Of the source
Of Fragrance,
The deer wanders
All over the forest
In its search![19]

For over two thousand years, all this abundant Indian art then, like the exquisite dancing figures on the columns outside the *garbhagṛha* in the Lunavāsahi temple at Dilwara, served one exalted purpose: to give us a glimpse of the true nature of the cosmic dance:

> It is a merry-go-round. One mask, one large stone-mask behind which all faces hide....of Oedipus and Gautam, of Galileo and Milton, of Curie and Mira....and of all the men who watch the long night....all holding hands....all, for one brief moment, seeing through the hollow eyes of the mask....and dancing....holding hands and dancing at the still-point in the centre of the whirlpool, where there is 'no dance, and there is only the dance.'[20]

Notes

1. Kumar, Sehdev. *The Lotus in the Stone*, p. 148.
2. 'Among School Children', *The Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats*, New York, 1955.
3. Eliot, T.S.
4. Barr, A. *Matisse: His Art and his Public*, New York, 1951, p. 281.
5. Lannoy, R. *The Speaking Tree*, p. 62.
6. As quoted by P. Pal in *The Sensuous Immortals*, p. 14.
7. Gaston, Anne-Marie. *Śiva in Dance, Myth and Iconography*, p. 47.
8. Ibid., p. 13.
9. Ibid., pp. 6-7.
10. Vatsyayan, K. *Classical Indian Dance in Literature and the Arts*, p. 43.
11. Bhavnani, E. *The Dance in India*, pp. 67-73.
12. Devi, Ragini. *Dance Dialects of India*, p. 79.
13. *Krishna: The Divine Lover*, pp. 172-183.
14. Tagore, Rabindranath, tr. *Songs of Kabir*, p. 6.
15. Coomaraswamy, A. *Rajput Paintings*, vol. I, pp. 29-40.
16. Ibid., p. 8.
17. Ibid., p. 9.
18. Ibid., p. 8.
19. Kumar, Sehdev. *The Vision of Kabir*, p. 194.
20. Kumar, Sehdev. *The Lotus in the Stone*, p. 148.

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Glossary

abhayamudrā: A gesture assuring fearlessness, with hand raised, palm forward, and fingers upward.

Ācārya: A spiritual preceptor.

akṣamālā: A rosary.

āmralumbi: The bunch of a mango tree.

aṅga: A buttress.

añjalimudrā: A gesture of worship and offering in which the palms join together near the chest.

aṅkuśa: A goad.

Apsarā: A heavenly damsel.

Ārādhaka: A worshipper.

ardhacandra: A crescent-shaped motif in the moonstone.

ardhapadma: An ornamental motif with half lotus flower, often set up in lunette bordered by beads.

aṣṭamaṅgalaka: The eight auspicious Jain symbols: *svastika* (swastika), *śrīvatsa* (a diamond-like sign), *nandyāvarta* (a variant of swastika), *varadhamānaka* (powder flask), *bhadrāsana* (throne), *kalaśa* (a full vase), *darpaṇa* (mirror), and *matsya* (fish).

āyāgapaṭṭa: A decorative stone slab.

balāṇaka: A hall at the entrance of the temple as in the Vimalavasāhi temple.

bhiṭṭa: A plinth; the lowermost moulding of the *pīṭha*.

caitya: A sanctuary.

cakra: A disc or a circle.

campaka: *Michelia champaca* flower.

candraśilā: A moonstone in front of the doorway, resembling a festoon.

caturmukha: A four-faced temple, with four entrances as in Ādīśvara temple in Ranakpur.

Caumukha: A four-faced image or shrine as in Ādīśvara temple in Ranakpur.

caurī: A fly-whisk; most images of the Jain divinities have *caurī*-bearers standing next to them.

ḍamarū: A small double-headed drum.

daṇḍa: A staff; a long walking-stick usually carried by Jain monks on long journeys.

darpaṇa: A mirror.

devakulikās: A row of shrine cells around a Jain temple as at Vimalavasāhi and Lunavasāhi.

dhvaja: A flag-pole.

dhyānamudrā: A gesture of meditation in which the hands are held in the lap, one above the other, with palms turned upward.

dikpāla: A regent of one of the eight directions.

dvārapāla: A guardian at the entrance.

gajatālu: Literally, an elephant's palate; in architecture, a coffered course in a ceiling decorated with rafters.

gandharva: A heavenly figure, usually a musician.

garbhagṛha: Literally, womb. The sanctum sanctorum.

gūḍhamaṇḍapa: The closed hall in front of the sanctum.

hastiśālā: A hall containing figures and statues of elephants carrying figures of the royal builder and his close relatives.

jagatī: A terrace or platform.

jñānamudrā: A hand gesture indicating self-knowledge; in this gesture the tips of the middle finger and the thumb are joined together and held close to the heart, with palm turned towards the heart.

kalaśa: Literally, a pitcher; in architecture it refers to the moulding of the *vedibandha*.

kāyotsarga: A standing posture in which the body is held erect and the two hands hang at the sides.

kevalajñāna: Omniscience.

khattaka: A deep sculptured niche in the *mukhamaṇḍapa*; there are two magnificent *khattakas* in the Lunavasāhi temple.

kīrttimukha: Literally, 'face of glory'; a leonine head with bulging eyes and flat nose.

kola: Literally, pig's tusk; in architecture, a cusped course in a ceiling decorated with rafters.

kṣipta: A ceiling where the courses recede in.

lakṣaṇa: A distinctive mark.

lalitāsana: A seated posture in which one leg is tucked on the seat, the other — with knee bent — resting on the ground.

lūmā: A decorative motif of the ceiling consisting of a pendant, or *kola* courses, disposed like a *nābhicchanda* ceiling, in diminishing concentric rings; in the latter form it looks like a depressed *lūmā*.

makara: An alligator or crocodile, often used as a decorative motif at the entrance to the temple.

mandāraka: A ceiling consisting of *padmaśilā*.

Meru: A mountain in four stages, each with a four-faced *Jina* image.

mithuna: An amorous couple.

mukhamaṇḍapa: A colonnaded vestibule between the *gūḍhamaṇḍapa* and the *raṅgamaṇḍapa*; also known as *trika* or *caukī-maṇḍapa*.

mūlanāyaka: The principal deity in the sanctum.

mūlaprāsāda: The Sanctum.

nābhicchanda: Literally, concentric; in architecture, it is a *kṣipta* ceiling consisting of *kolas*.

nābhimandāraka: A composite ceiling consisting of *nābhicchanda* and *mandāraka* elements.

Nāga: A snake.

Nāgin: A female serpent.

Nandīśvaradvīpa: A stone plaque with 52 miniature shrines arranged in four groups of thirteen each.

navacaukī: An open hall, *mukhamaṇḍapa*, containing nine bays.

Nāyikā: A damsel.

Nirvāṇa: Liberation from all bondage.

padma: Literally, lotus; in architecture, a cyma moulding, often decorated with lotus petals.

padmaka: A ceiling where the *lūmās*, often eight in number, are prominently shown.

padmanābha: A composite ceiling consisting of *padmaka* and *nābhicchanda* elements.

padmapatra: The lotus scroll.

padmāsana: A seated posture with both legs crossed and with feet resting on the thighs.

padmaśilā: The central lotus pendant of a ceiling.

pañcakalyāṇaka: Five auspicious events in the life of a *Jina*.

paraśu: A battle-axe.

parikara: An ornamental frame of an image.

patākā: A flag or a banner.

phāṁsanā: The stepped pyramidal roof.

pīṭha: The basement; the member between the ground and the *vedibandha*.

prākāra: An enclosure wall around the temple.

Pratihāra: A guardian.

raṅgamaṇḍapa: An open hall in front of the *mukhamaṇḍapa* but rarely in front of *gūḍhamaṇḍapa*; it is a hall for dramatic and dance performances.

ratha: A buttress.

sabhāmandāraka: A composite ceiling consisting of *sabhāmārga* and *mandāraka* elements.

samatala: A ceiling with ornate flat surface.

Samavasaraṇa: A congregation hall built by celestial beings, where gods, men and animals assemble to listen the discourse of a *tīrthaṅkara*. In art, it is shown as a circular fortified structure surmounted by a quadruple of *Jina*.

śaṅkha: A conch.

saparikara: An image of Jina with a *parikara*.

śārdūla: A mythical animal with leonine features.

siṁhāsana: A throne.

Śrāvaka: A layman.

Śrāvikā: A laywoman.

toraṇa: A portal.

toraṇa-arch: An ornamental arch between two columns.

tribhaṅga: A posture in which the body is flexed thrice.

triśūla: A trident.

tri-tīrthī: A panel with figures of three Jinas.

vāhana: Literally, a mount; in iconography, a distinctive sign or cognizance.

vajra: A thunderbolt.

varadākṣa: A boon-giving posture with rosary.

varadamudrā: A boon-giving posture, with hand lowered, palm forward and fingers pointing downwards.

vasahī or *vasati*: A temple.

vedibandha: Podium.

Vidyādhara: Literally, 'carriers of knowledge'; an angelic being, human in form and without wings.

vihāra: A monastery.

vīṇā: A lute.

vyākhyānamudrā: A gesture of giving a sermon in which the tips of the thumb and forefinger touch each other to form a circle; the other fingers are kept open. The palm of the hand is raised up near the breast towards the front.

vyāla: A mythical composite animal of leonine form.

Credits for Illustrations

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Naṭarāja, Kangra, 18th century A.D.

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